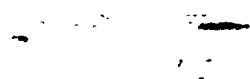


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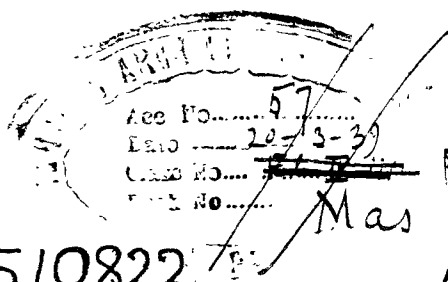


COURT POETS OF IRAN AND INDIA

AN ANTHOLOGY
OF
WIT AND VERSE

39308

BY
R. P. MASANI



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Foreword

BY

HIS HIGHNESS MAHOMED ALI KHAN FOROUGHI,
PRIME MINISTER, IRAN

خوشا بسعادتی کسانی که توفیق می یابند که تمام عمر یا لا اقل قسمتی از اوقات خویش را صرف شعروادب سازند زیرا که بعقیده من باده بی خمار ولذت بی آزار همانا تمتعی است که شخص از سخنان پاکیزه دلپذیر می برد و بنابراین باید سپاسگذار بود نسبت به کسانی که اسباب این تمتع را برای ما فراهم میکنند یعنی در درجه اول سرایندگان و انشاء کنندگان آن سخنان و بعد از آن کسانی که ما را بآن نعمت رهبری می نمایند و متوجه آنها میسازند یا آنها را در دسترس ما میگذارند.

این جانب این سپاسگذاری را نسبت بدوست گرامی خود آقای رستم مسانی بر دمه دارم زیرا گذشته از تمتعی که در مواقع دیگر از مطالعه آثار گرانمای ایشان از قبیل ترجمه منطق الطیر بزبان انگلیسی حاصل نموده ام اخیراً چندین ساعت از اوقاتم بمطالعه کتابی که راجع بشعراي درباري ایران تصنیف کرده اند خوش شد و چندین قسم بهره از آن برده ام با بعضی قضایا که سابقاً دیده و دانسته بودم تجدید عهد کردم و از یلوه آمیزش آنها لذت بردم بعضی اطلاعات و اشعار خاصه در آنچه راجع به رجال و شعراي هندوستان است برای من تازه گشت و از آنها بی خبر بودم. ترجمه اشعار فارسی هم که خود آقای رستم مسانی یا دیگران بزبان انگلیسی کرده اند کیفیت مخصوصی می بخشد و نیز قصه ها و حکایاتی که بمناسبت ابیات نقل کرده اند بسیار شیرین است و بر تمتعی که از اشعار برده میشود

می افزاید خلاصه اینکه آقای رستم مسانی بعنوان شعرائی درباری مجموعه از قصه های شیرین و اشعار دلنشین ترتیب داده و در واقع یکدوره تاریخ شعر فارسی و شعرائی فارسی زبانرا بصورت داستان و حکایت در آورده و موضوعی را که اصلاً خوش آیند است دلیلی تر ساخته اند .

بغایر این کمال مسرت را دارم که باین چند سطر مختصر جلب توجه خوانندگان محترم را باین تالیف شریف بنمایم و درازای تمتعی که از زحمات آقای رستم مسانی برده ام عاشقان شعر و ادبیات فارسی را باستفاده از ان راهنمایی کنم که قند پارسی طوطیان هندوستان را شکر شکن کرده و اینک قند مکرر شده و نه تنها بایران برگشته بلکه بوسیله زبان انگلیسی کلیه اهل ذوق را محظوظ و مستفید خواهد نمود .
در خاتمه از خداوند مسئلت می نمایم که باقی رستم مسانی توفیق کرامت نماید که از این قبیل گنجینه ها باز از خود بیادگار گذارند و سپاسگذاری ما را افزون نمایند .

فروغی محمد علی

Foreword

LUCKY are they who are blessed with the good fortune to devote their life-time, or at least a small portion of it, to poetry and literature ; because, verily, in my opinion, the wine that does not inebriate, the dainty that does no harm, is the delight which a person derives from elegant and pleasing verses. Thanks must, therefore, be offered to the persons who have provided material for such rapture ; that is, in the first place, to the singers and composers of such verses, and in the second place, to those who act as our guides to such treasure, draw our attention to them and place them within our reach.

In this direction I consider it an obligation to express my thanks to my esteemed friend Mr. Rustom Masani, because, in addition to the pleasure I have derived on other occasions from the perusal of his precious work, namely, his translation into English of the *Mantiq-ut-Tair*, latterly many hours of my time have been gladdened by the perusal of the book which he has composed on the subject of the Court Poets of Iran, and I have derived considerable benefit from it. The memory of some of the incidents which I had formerly heard of was revived ; and I was delighted to be thus reminded of them. Some other anecdotes and verses, specially those relating to the people and poets of India, were new to me, as I was not aware of them. The translation of the Persian verses, either by Mr. Rustom Masani himself, or reproduced as rendered by others, invests them with a special charm. Further, the anecdotes and stories relating to the verses, which have been reproduced in this book, are very sweet, and add

to the enjoyment derived from the verses themselves. In short, Mr. Rustom Masani has compiled a collection of delightful anecdotes and pleasing verses under the title of Court Poets. He has given a history of Persian poetry, as well as of the Persian Poets in the form of anecdotes and narratives, and has made a subject delightful in itself still more delightful.

I have, therefore, much pleasure in bringing to the notice of the reading public, by means of these few lines, this excellent composition; and it is a source of gratification to me to invite, in return for the pleasure I have derived from the literary labour of Mr. Rustom Masani, the lovers of Persian poetry and literature to the feast provided in this work. The sugar candy of Iran provided sugar for the parrots of India; and lo! it has become doubly sweet; not only has it returned to Iran, but it will also, through the medium of the English language, give pleasure and delight to keen lovers of literature throughout the world.

In conclusion, I pray to God that He may confer His blessings on Mr. Rustom Masani so that he may leave behind him mementos of many such treasures, and thus increase our debt of gratitude to him.

FOROUGHİ MAHOMED ALI.

Preface

HIS Imperial Majesty Shah Reza Shah Pahlawi's invitation to Dr. Rabindranath Tagore to visit the land of Sa'di and Hafiz during the year 1932 may be regarded as an event of considerable interest in the cultural history of Iran and India. It was to the author of this book, during his sojourn in the kingdom of the Shah with the Nightingale of Ind, a vivid reminder of those radiant epochs in the literary history of India when the splendour and munificence of the courts of Indian monarchs lured to Hindustan many a brilliant bard from Iran, Afghanistan and Turkistan. It also revived the memory of the glorious galaxy of singers who were accorded seats of honour in the darbars of the Shahs and of the delightful verses, repartees and epigrams with which they used to enliven and enchant their royal masters and their entourage. These luminaries of the courts of Iran and India were particularly renowned for their peculiar genius for extempore versification, their exquisite skill in poetising offhand ordinary, prosaic incidents of life and for their charming fancy which idealized in thought and elevated in expression the most commonplace sentiments, wearisome wishes and even the most vexatious whims and fantastic decrees of their patrons. Remarkable also were those improvisators of both sexes for the agility with which they came down, at a moment's notice, upon their rivals with a torrent of fiery verses impressive in their sombre cadence and rich in rhetorical embellishment, verses for which there is hardly a parallel in the literature of any other nation. Nor is there in the literary lore of any country in the East or in the West any evidence of such

pointed weapons of ridicule, satire and abuse, as were wielded by those expert gladiators with amazing dexterity.

An Irani is, so to say, born with a song on his lips. He lisps in numbers, because the numbers come. Moreover, the extraordinary richness of his vocabulary in rhythmic expressions enables him to find a large succession of appropriate words on a single rhyme. For instance, one of the poets, Rashidu'd-din Watwat, has composed a poem (*gasida*) of seventy lines, in which every word of an hemistich rhymes with every corresponding word in the next. In what other language would such a poetic feat be possible? Indeed, ease and elegance of metrical expression is a gift in which the Persian nation as a whole remains unsurpassed. It is this natural endowment of poetic expression that accounts for the spontaneous flow of wit and verse in the darbars of the Sultans of Iran and India.

Court poetry forms a unique feature of the poetic literature of Iran, which may be compared to an ornate casket studded with gems reflecting not only the superb creative power of individual poets, their dazzling imagination, exquisite word-play, sprightly wit and humour and cutting satire, but also the splendour of the national genius for versification. Although it forms only a fragment of Persian poetry, it would take volumes to give an account of all the poets who adorned the courts of Iran and India, or to give selections from their poems. In this book we can merely have a glimpse of the splendour of those courts and of the stars that illuminated them. No attempt has been made to incorporate elaborate biographical notices or to compile an anthology of the best verses of those poets. The book is not intended to be a scholarly production. All that is aimed

at is to stimulate interest in Persian poetry and literature generally, by presenting to the general reader a few interesting anecdotes concerning some of the brilliant figures of the Iranian Parnassus, together with a few gems with which they dazzled their royal masters and their assemblies and had their mouths filled, in return, with jewels. The Sultans commanded them to ‘ pierce the pearls of words with the needle of the Muses ’, and the poets promptly responded and produced string after string of glistening pearls, which call to memory Pope’s address to the goddess of song :

‘ Granville commands ; your aid, O Muses, bring ;
What Muse for Granville can refuse to sing ? ’

The scholar will, I am afraid, discover many defects in this publication ; the ordinary reader may, perhaps, find something in it to commend. The defects are undoubtedly mine, but for the merits, if any, credit is due not to me but to the authors of various publications—Persian and English—on which I have freely drawn. I have taken care to acknowledge at the proper places the sources of my information, but I should like specially to give expression to my sense of indebtedness to Lutf Ali Beg, Dawlatshah and Riza Quli Khan, whose well-known biographical notices in Persian, and to F. F. Arbuthnot, Ouseley, Levy, Professor Browne, Professor Ghani and M. N. Kuka, whose works in English, have been my constant companions during the preparation of this volume.

I also tender my warm acknowledgments to His Highness Mahomed Ali Khan Foroughi, the erudite scholar and popular Prime Minister of Iran for going minutely through the manuscript of this book, in the midst of the exacting duties of his exalted office, and for

his valued suggestions and foreword. I am also indebted to my friends, Dewan Bahadur K. M. Jhaveri, M.A., LL.B., Khan Bahadur Professor Shaikh Abdul-Kadir-e-Sarfaraz, M.A., and Professor Dr. U. M. Daudpota, M.A., PH.D., for many helpful suggestions.

R. P. M.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
Foreword by His Highness Mahomed Ali Khan	
Foroughi, Prime Minister, Iran ...	...iii-vi
1. Preface ...	...vii-x
2. Early Persian Poetry ...	... 1
3. The Father of Persian Poetry ...	... 7
4. A Quadrangular Contest ...	... 10
5. A Monarch's Meanness ...	... 12
6. 'Three Hundred Melted By the Way !' ...	... 14
7. A Grinding Stone-mill ...	... 16
8. Unsuri Sets the Fashion of Shingling ! ...	... 17
9. Short Nights in Spring ...	... 19
10. What the Horse told the Poet ...	... 20
11. Azraqi's Flight of Fancy ...	... 21
12. A Lesson in Humility ...	... 22
13. Umar Khayyam's Yearly Pension ...	... 24
14. Prognostication of the Weather ...	... 26
15. Umar's Scepticism ...	... 27
16. Learn Thou Humility, Ye Man of Learning ! ...	... 28
17. From College to the Royal Court ...	... 30
18. Only a Twittering Swallow ! ...	... 33
19. Who Was the Greater Blockhead ? ...	... 37
20. Striking at a Gnat ...	... 38
21. Extempore Verses Open Prison Doors ! ...	... 39
22. A Question of Decorum ...	... 40
23. A Poet's Defiance of a Monarch's Threat... ..	... 41
24. An Intrepid Vizier ...	... 42
25. Drinking to a Poet's Blindness ! ...	... 44
26. A Dervish's Admonition to Attar ...	... 46
27. 'The Sultan of Savants' ...	... 47
28. Jalal Hypnotized ...	... 48
29. A Shepherd Boy Becomes a Court Poet ...	... 51
30. Quarrel Over a Pen-Name ...	... 53
31. Keep Thy Silver to Thyself ! ...	... 54
32. A Thrilling Threnody ...	... 55
33. The Apparel doth Not Make the Man ...	... 56
34. Khaqani's Disgust of Court Life ...	... 58

	PAGE
35. Salman-e-Sawaji's Royal Pupils ...	60
36. Story of a Candlestick ...	61
37. A Brilliant Feat ...	62
38. Rustam's Bow ...	63
39. The Biter Bit ...	65
40. A Casket of Pearls ...	68
41. On the Fringe of the Fountain of Life ! ...	69
42. An Infidel in the Garden of Paradise ...	71
43. Royalty's Homage to Nizami ...	72
44. Prediction of Amir Khusraw's Fame ...	74
45. Blending of Hindi with Persian ...	75
46. Cultural Contact of Iran with India ...	77
47. 'Gather Ye Rosebuds while Ye May !' ...	78
48. A Brahman Persian Poet and Professor ...	79
49. Invitation to Sa'di from the Governor of Multan ...	80
50. A Graceful Compliment to Atabeg ...	81
51. Better the Travails of a Journey than Comforts at Home ! ...	81
52. Contempt for Court Poets of India ...	82
53. A Merry Prince ...	83
54. On a Mandate to Close All Taverns ...	84
55. On the Re-opening of Taverns ...	86
56. A Call from the Deccan ...	88
57. Shiraz Sugar for Parrots of Hindustan ...	90
58. Auguries from the Poet's Verses ...	92
59. An Invitation to Kamalu'd-din Ismail ...	94
60. Kamal-i-Khujandi's Mystic Verses ...	96
61. A Victim of Green-eyed Jealousy ...	98
62. On the Unity of Being ...	99
63. Dainties from the Table of a Gourmet ...	103
64. Dough Strings of the Bowl of Wisdom ! ...	106
65. Khaqani Burlesqued ...	107
66. Roastmeat <i>vs.</i> Lentils ...	107
67. Hafiz's Verses Parodied ...	108
68. All Invited to His Table ...	109
69. Jami's Connection with India... ..	110
70. A Grievance against the Baghdadis ...	112
71. The Tables Turned ...	113
72. A Crow's Egg Will Become a Crow ...	114

	PAGE
73. A Poet's Defiance of a Royal Decree ...	116
74. A Prince's Persuasion ...	116
75. The Sign of a True Lover ...	117
76. The Hand of Destiny ...	118
77. Fighani's Fear and Umar's Prayer ...	119
78. Katibi's Defence of Prodigality ...	121
79. The Rose and the Nightingale ...	123
80. A Thief Has Fallen on a Thief ! ...	125
81. Incision of the Tongue increases Eloquence } ...	125
82. Humayun as a Poet ...	127
83. A Wordy War on the Ethics of War ...	127
84. The Moth and the Candle ...	128
85. Henna Develops Colour in India ! ...	129
86. A Nightingale of Kabul settles in Delhi ...	129
87. Akbar's Library ...	131
88. The Chain of Friendship ...	132
89. No Cap of Royalty for a Bald Head ...	132
90. A Wordy Warfare ...	133
91. On the Death of His Child ...	136
92. Boast of Abbas and Pride of Akbar ...	137
93. Liberality of Khan-i-Khanan ...	138
94. Shah Abbas Humiliated ...	138
95. High Praise of Urfi by Faizi ...	140
96. Faizi's Puppies ...	140
97. No Playfulness Without Permission ! ...	141
98. Maulana Naw'i ...	142
99. An Anacreon of the Mughal Court ...	143
100. A Broom of Eyelashes ! ...	143
101. 'King of the Region of Eloquence' ...	144
102. What's in a Name ? Lots ! ...	144
103. Zuhuri: The Poet Laureate of Bijapur ...	145
104. Elephant load of Gold ...	146
105. A Unique Pair of Poets ...	147
106. The Holy Dust of Bijapur ...	148
107. Poet Sa'ib Plays the Truant ...	148
108. A Wonderful Improvisator ...	150
109. On Stealing a Kiss ...	151
110. These but the Trappings and the Suits of Woe ! ...	152
111. A Mystic Gift to a Disappointed Bard ...	154

	PAGE
112. Jeering Jealousy	155
113. Haidar Kullaj Vents His Spleen ...	156
114. A Satirist Quotes Scriptures ! ...	157
115. Sweet Content !	157
116. A Poet that Deserved to be Hung ! ...	158
117. Verses without Salt in them	159
118. Taking Salt from Arzu's Tray	160
119. Salt and Salt Cellar	161
120. A Dubious Exchange of Compliments ...	161
121. A Challenge to Shah Jahan	163
122. How Can Water Be Dashed to Pieces ? ...	163
123. Poetic Duels between Nur Jahan and Jahangir ...	165
124. Fine Fancy	166
125. Sultana Mahsati's Impromptu... ..	167
126. Dilaram's Check	168
127. Zib'un Nisa Begum's Cutting Reply ...	170
128. The Crow Flew off the Mouth !	171
129. Reward and Retribution in one Breath ...	174
130. Court of King or Court of God ?	175
131. A Vizier's Wine-worship	176
132. Haidari's Invocation	178
133. A Mixed Effusion of Praise and Complaint ! ...	180
134. A Horse Famous for Fasting !	181
135. Story of a Black Horse	182
136. A Garment Illumined by the ' Suns of Prophets ' ! ...	184
137. Katibi's Wail	185
138. Kamalu'd-din's Biting Satire	186
139. An Irate Panegyrist	187
140. The New Moon	188
141. Worse than the Assassin's Dagger	190
142. Exit the Court Poet	191
143. Between the Raging Wolf and the Lion ...	193
144. The ' King of Poets ' denounces the King ! ...	196
145. Reza Shah's Court Illumined by His Deeds ...	199
146. No Trace of Anarchy	199

Early Persian Poetry

WHEN we speak of Persian literature or poetry, we generally mean the literature or poetry of modern or Islamic Iran. The immediate predecessors of the Muhammadans were the ancient Zoroastrians whose mighty monarchs have left their mark on the history of Asia as well as of Europe and whose gifted seers and scholars have made material contributions to the civilization and culture of the East and the West. Iran itself was a comparatively small province, but the tide of conquest gathered many nations beneath her banner. The dominion of Cyrus extended from the Indus to the Mediterranean and from the snowy peaks of Caucasus to the shores of the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea. The court of Darius received tribute from Egypt and Babylonia, from Assyria and India, from Media, Lydia, Phoenesia and many other lands. Those ancient Iranians were renowned for their thirst for knowledge and genius for poetry. Their country was founded upon the ruins of even more ancient monarchies than theirs and just as their treasury was replenished by the spoils of conquered nations, so was their civilization enriched by that of Nineveh and Babylon and their literature embellished by the philosophy, poetry and mythology of their predecessors.

Before the Qurān superseded the Avesta on the soil of Iran, the Persian language in its divers forms was the medium of a vast and gorgeous literature. The earliest form in which this language was reduced to writing was the cuneiform alphabetic script employed by the Achaemenian kings. This was used for the

	PAGE
112. Jeering Jealousy	155
113. Haidar Kullaj Vents His Spleen	156
114. A Satirist Quotes Scriptures !... ..	157
115. Sweet Content !	157
116. A Poet that Deserved to be Hung !	158
117. Verses without Salt in them	159
118. Taking Salt from Arzu's Tray	160
119. Salt and Salt Cellar	161
120. A Dubious Exchange of Compliments	161
121. A Challenge to Shah Jahan	163
122. How Can Water Be Dashed to Pieces ?	163
123. Poetic Duels between Nur Jahan and Jahangir	165
124. Fine Fancy	166
125. Sultana Mahsati's Impromptu... ..	167
126. Dilaram's Check	168
127. Zib'un Nisa Begum's Cutting Reply	170
128. The Crow Flew off the Mouth !	171
129. Reward and Retribution in one Breath	174
130. Court of King or Court of God ?	175
131. A Vizier's Wine-worship	176
132. Haidari's Invocation	178
133. A Mixed Effusion of Praise and Complaint !	180
134. A Horse Famous for Fasting !	181
135. Story of a Black Horse	182
136. A Garment Illumined by the ' Suns of Prophets ' !	184
137. Katibi's Wail	185
138. Kamalu'd-din's Biting Satire	186
139. An Irate Panegyrist	187
140. The New Moon	188
141. Worse than the Assassin's Dagger	190
142. Exit the Court Poet	191
143. Between the Raging Wolf and the Lion	193
144. The ' King of Poets ' denounces the King !	196
145. Reza Shah's Court Illumined by His Deeds	199
146. No Trace of Anarchy	199

inscriptions recounting the deeds and conquests of the Persian emperors such as Darius the Great.

Barring the inscriptions, the earliest literature belonging to Iran, which is still extant, is the Zend-Avesta, the language of the Parsi scriptures. Modern research reveals that these scriptures must have existed at least ten centuries before Christ. In later times—those of the Parthians—the cumbersome cuneiform script was superseded by an alphabet, based on the Aramaic alphabet, called *Pahlawi*. This alphabet was used not only for inscriptions but also for the commentaries on the sacred books of the Zoroastrians, which are still preserved by the followers of the faith in Iran and in India. Another branch of old Persian is represented by the literature discovered in recent years beneath the sandy soil of Central Asia, written in the Sughdian language. The alphabet employed was also derived from the Aramaic alphabet.

After the conversion of Iran to Islam, the Arab rulers discarded the language of the country and introduced Arabic. The mother-tongue of Iran, however, refused to be thus displaced by a foreign language. Its vitality as well as its popularity were so great that, given the opportunity, it recovered its supremacy during the days of the princes of the house of Saman, distinguished for their encouragement of learning. No doubt, in the Persian language, as it was since written, there was a mixture of Arabic just as there is an admixture of English words in the Gujarati, Marathi and Urdu languages, as they are now spoken in India. The tendency of the modern era, however, is to restore the mother-tongue to its pristine purity.

So often was Iran, once the highway of the human race, trodden under foot by conquering hordes that

hardly any vestige of ancient Persian literature has been preserved. There is no authentic record of early Persian poetry, none even of the poetic output of the two centuries following the advent of Islam. From the time of the conquest of Alexander till the tenth century the history of Persian poetry is almost a blank page. To whom should go the distinction of having composed the first verse in Persian, it is as yet difficult to decide. The title of the Father of Persian Poetry is, no doubt, given with one accord to Abu-'l Hasan-e-Rudagi, who lived under the Samanid king *Nasr b. Ahmad* (A.D. 913-942), but tradition ascribes to various personages several pieces of poetry, composed before that era, which mark the beginning of modern Persian literature. The earliest are assigned to Bahram Gor, a Sasanian prince. (A.D. 420-439.) It is generally believed that Shah Bahram Gor used to address Dilaram in verse and that she too had the gift to reply to him in tuneful numbers, the music of their souls springing to their lips in cadenced words.

According to another tradition, the famous minstrel, Barbad, who was an ornament of the court of the Sasanian monarch Khusraw Parwiz, used to sing ballads in which the rhythm depended on the number of syllables used in each verse. The special merit ascribed to this bard was the gift of weaving dexterously into a song and breaking gently to the king unpleasant news which none else would muster courage to convey to him.

It is said that Parwiz loved a favourite horse so passionately that:—

‘ He with an oath most solemn and most binding,
Not to be loosed, had sworn upon the Fire
That whoso first said “ Shabdiz hath perished ”,
Should die upon the cross in torments dire.’

One morning, the beautiful animal lay low in death. The Master of the Horse beseeched Barbad to break the sad tidings gently to the king.

‘ Four strings wailed o’er him, while the minstrel
kindled
Pity and passion by the witchery
Of his left hand, and while the strings vibrated,
Chanted a wailing Persian threnody.’¹

Realising the significance of the doleful song, the monarch exclaimed: ‘Woe unto thee! My horse Shabdiz is dead.’ ‘It is the king who sayeth it,’ said the bard, who thus escaped the threatened death.

Poetic Strains in the Avesta

The unknown author of *Ta’rīkh-i-Sīstān*, which contains many specimens of ancient Persian poetry, however, traces the earliest effort at metrical composition to times more remote and quotes some hymns sung by Zoroastrian priests at a fire-temple.² Indeed, if we regard the religious songs of those early days as the precursor of Persian poetry, we may hail the Prophet of Iran as her first poet, whose *Gathas* embody his teachings in sublime verse. Darmesteter thinks it possible that ‘Herodotus may have heard the Magi sing, in the fifth century before Christ, the very same *Gathas* which are sung now-a-days by the *Mobeds* (priests) of Bombay.’³ There are also touches of poetry in the Avestan *Yeshts*, composed in metrical stanzas.

¹ This is the tale told by the Arab poet Khalid b. Fayyaz and quoted by Edward Browne in his *Literary History of Persia*, Vol. I, pp. 17-18.

² In his *Poets of the Pahlavi Regime* D. J. Irani gives several other illustrations from the sacred books of the Zoroastrians.

³ *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. IV.

Coming to later times, we have the testimony of Professor Jackson that the poet's art was a cherished one in Sasanian times. He points out that in the story of Wamiq and Azra and in the songs of Barbad is heard the faint echo of 'the gentle thrum of the lute strings, the true accompaniment of poesy'.¹ Many poets are reported to have since composed verses in the Persian language, but despite its simple metre, rhythm and rhyme, their versification was not accepted as poetry by the early Muslim writers, who insisted on rigid conformity to the minutiae of the rules of prosody, formulated for them by Khalil b. Ahmad. We have, therefore, to take a leap of more than three centuries and transport ourselves to the court of Yaqub b. Layth, 'the Copper-smith' founder of the Saffari dynasty (A.D. 868-878), for hearing the first accredited bard of the Persian Darbar.

After Yaqub had conquered Herat, he made a triumphant entry into his capital town Sistan. The poets of the day vied with one another in welcoming the rising sun and addressed Arabic verses to him in celebration of the victory. Being quite innocent of Arabic, Yaqub exclaimed: 'Why should people recite what I cannot understand?' On hearing this, Muhammad b. Wasif, a distinguished scholar of the time, recited a *qasida* from which a few verses are quoted in *Ta'rikh-i-Sistān*.

Muhammad-e-Awfi states in *Lubāb u'l-Albāb* that the first Persian poem was composed by a poet named Abbas of Merv in honour of Khalif al-Mamun, the son of Harunu'r-Rashid, on the occasion of his entry into

¹ *Early Persian Poetry*.

Vide also Professor Dr. U. M. Daudpota's Paper on the *Relation of Early Persian Poetry with Arabic* in the J. J. Modi Memorial Volume.

that city in A.D. 809, but the authenticity of this statement is doubted by scholars of repute. Mirza Muhammad Khan-e-Qazwini points out that the oldest Persian poem mentioned in historical works appears to have been written by an Arab poet named Yazid b. Muffarigh. (A. D. 679.) It was, however, of the *rajaz* character. According to a story given by Dawlatshah in his Memoirs of the Poets, the first Persian verse was a joyous utterance of Yaqub's own son. Be that as it may, there is no conflict of opinion as to who the Father of Persian poetry was.

The Father of Persian Poetry

THE princes who, after the Arab conquest, were the earliest in encouraging the revival of the Persian language and literature, were the Samanid (A.D. 901-998). Of these patrons of learning Amir Naşr, who reigned in Khurasan, was the most enthusiastic. During his regime flourished the famous court poet, Master Abu'l Hasan-e-Rudagi, the father of Persian poetry, who made a metrical translation of Bidpay's Fables into Persian from an Arabic version. A copy of this famous book had been originally brought to Iran from India during the reign of Nushirwan the Just, and translated into Pahlawi. For this work Rudagi received a prize of forty thousand dirhams from his royal master. Thus were rewards and honours showered on the Chaucer of Persia. The retinue of his attendants formed a line of two hundred, while double the number, we are told, was needed to carry his baggage.

With the gift of a versatile poet Rudagi combined the voice of a singer and the skill of a harper. When Amir Naşr conquered Khurasan, he found the climate of Herat, with its twenty different varieties of grape and beautiful narcissus, very agreeable. Enchanted by the region around Herat, he tarried there for four years, away from home. His homesick courtiers and military officers were, however, weary of prolonged residence in that town. They offered Rudagi five thousand dinars if he could win the Amir's thoughts back to his native place. One morning, when Naşr had quaffed his morning cup, the gifted bard took up the lute and, playing the

‘lover’s air’, began an elegy opening with this tender strain:

بزي جوي موليان آيد هي * ياد يار مهربان آيد هي
ريگ آموي ودرشتيهاي او * زير پايم پرنديان آيد هي
آب جيون با همه پهنوري * خنگ مارا تامين آيد هي
اي بخارا شاد باش و شاد زي * شاه سويت ميهمان آيد هي
مير ماه است و بخارا آسمان * ماه سوي آسمان آيد هي
مير سرو است و بخارا بوستان * سرو سوي بوستان آيد هي

‘ The perfume sweet of Muliyan’s stream comes, aye,
to me ;

Remembrance, too, of longed-for friends comes,
aye, to me.

The sandy road by Oxus’ banks, that rugged way,
Silk-soft beneath my feet to me appears to-day ;
And Jihun’s waves, for very joy at their friend’s
face,

Rise to our waists in blithesome mood with fond
embrace.

Be joyful, O Bukhara glad ! Long live thou !—
since

Here to thee joyous comes thy life, thy own glad
Prince.

Thy Prince, Bukhara, is the Moon, and thou, the
Sky ;

In heaven’s vault the Moon, behold, is mounting
high ;

A cypress, he !—Bukhara, thou a garth ablow,
Anon the cypress shall within the garden grow ! ’¹

¹ As rendered by Prof. Jackson in *Early Persian Poetry*.

Nizami Aruzi of Samarqand, who relates this story, says that when Rudagi reached the last verse, the Amir was so deeply moved that he mounted a horse and set off for Bukhara post haste, forgetting to put on his riding boots, which had to be carried after him by an attendant!

The overjoyed courtiers and officers gave the bard ten thousand dinars, double the amount of the prize originally offered.

A Quadrangular Contest

IN the history of India Mahmud of Ghazna is known as a religious bigot, a relentless iconoclast, who profaned and demolished the Hindu temple of Somnath. His love for learning and literature was, however, as fervent as was his religious zeal. Being a man of the pen as well as of the sword, he composed verses himself and enjoyed the company of men of letters. We are told by Dawlatshah that four hundred 'appointed poets' thronged his capital. It was in his reign that the post of *malik u'sh shu'arā*, or poet laureate (literally, 'King of poets'), was first established, and Unsuri was selected for the distinction. This office was kept up at the court of Persia for centuries, but, for reasons we shall notice later, it has now fallen into desuetude.

There is an interesting legend connected with Firdawsi's journey to the capital of Ghazna. Although oft repeated, it cannot be omitted from this narrative, as it shows how keen Persian poets were to encounter one another in impromptu poetic combats. The story runs that on his way to Ghazna, Firdawsi passed a public garden and arrived at a spot where the three principal poets of the Darbar, Unsuri, Asjadi, and Farrukhi, were engaged in pleasant conversation. Resenting the intrusion, Unsuri said to the stranger, 'We are the poets of the court and none but poets may enter our company.' They suggested that each of them should compose a hemistich and that Firdawsi should complete the fourth. The gifted stranger said he would try. Unsuri thereupon deliberately chose the hardest conceivable rhyme in Persian poetry, a rhyme wherein

three verses might be composed but not four, as he imagined.

The contest began with the first line from Unsuri, as follows :—

جون عارض تو ماه نباشد روشن

The moon is not so radiant as thy face.

Asjadi followed with :—

مانند رخت گل نبود در گلشن

There is no rose in the garden that thy cheek can match.

Then joined Farrukhi with :

مژگانمت گذر کند هي از جوشن

Thine eyelashes pierce the helmet like a lance.

The trio then awaited with ill-concealed amusement the performance of Firdawsi, as they knew there was no other word in the Persian language to rhyme with the words, *roshan*, *gulshan* and *joshan*. Firdawsi's knowledge of the early history of his country, however, came to his rescue, and he forthwith completed the quatrain with the hemistich

مانند سنان گيو در جنگ پشن

Like the spear of Giv in the duel with Poshan.

It was, indeed, a matter for humiliation for the three Darbar poets that they had not heard before the story of the contest between Giv and Poshan. They cheerfully accepted Firdawsi as their compeer and introduced him to Sultan Mahmud as a poet fully competent to write the national epic.

A Monarch's Meanness

A MAGNIFICENT residence was erected for Firdawsi near the palace of the king and the best painters of the age were employed to cover the walls with portraits of kings and heroes and with paintings of the most imposing military encounters ; in short, with everything that could excite martial valour and fire the imagination of the poet.

After thirty years of incessant work the ' Book of Kings,' consisting of sixty thousand couplets, was completed. The whole work is written in the form of a mathnavi, or narrative poem, in stirring couplets which give a thrilling history of the kings of Persia from the earliest times to the fall of the last monarch Yazdajird (A.D. 650) and revive the old Iran of pre-Islamic days. Faithfully adhering to all available sources of information, legendary as well as historical, ' Christ-like he called all the dead heroes to life again '.

Firdawsi should have got sixty thousand gold coins, but the Prime Minister Hasan-e-Maymandi is reported to have represented to the king that looking to the condition of the treasury it would not be possible to spare such a large amount. Besides, he urged, it would be a folly to pay such an enormous sum of money for a mere poem. The king acquiesced, and it was decided that the poet should be paid sixty thousand silver coins instead of the promised gold. Little did he realize the ignominy of going back on a plighted word.

When the bags of silver were taken to the poet, he was indignant and contemptuously gave away the amount to all and sundry. The Prime Minister took good care to report to the Shah the insult deliberately hurled against him by the poet. Furious with rage, the Shah

ordered that the poet should be trampled to death under the feet of an elephant.¹ Firdawsi sought safety in flight.

Gone are the greatness and glory of Mahmud, and the only incident in his reign that people recall to-day after a thousand years is the story of the disappointed bard in which the Sultan figures as a niggard patron, who failed to appreciate adequately the worth of a matchless poet. On the other hand Firdawsi's fame has endured, for his were no idle words when, in a prophetic strain, he sang that he had written

‘ What no tide
Shall ever wash away, what men
Unborn shall read o’er ocean wide.’

¹ According to another account, it was not the minister, but the poet's enemies who poisoned Mahmud's ears.

‘Three Hundred Melted By the Way!’

TO compare small men with great, another poet deprived of his full reward was *Barandaq*. Once Sultan Bayqara, the grandson of Timur, ordered that the poet should be given a reward of 500 gold dinars. He, however, received a cheque for 200 dinars.

Next morning the king received the following artful requisition for the balance :

شاه دشمن گداز دوست نواز
 آن جهانگیر کو جهاندار است *
 بیش یوزالتون نمود انعام
 لطف سلطان به بنده بسیار است *
 سی صد از جمله غایب است کنون
 در براتم دو صد پدیدار است *
 یا مگر من غلط شنیدستم
 یا که پروانه چي غلط کار است *
 یا که اندر عبارت ترکي
 بیش یوزالتون دویست دینار است *

Here is a somewhat free but metrical version of these couplets, given in Beale's *Oriental Biography* :

‘The Shah, the terror of his foes,
 Who well the sound of flattery knows,
 The conqueror of the world, the lord
 Of nations vanquished by his sword,
 Gave, while he praised my verse, to me
 Five hundred ducats as a fee.

Great was the Sultan's generous mood,
 Great is his servant's gratitude,
 And great the sum ; but strange to say,
 Three hundred melted by the way !
 Perhaps the word in Turkish tongue
 Convenient meaning contrive ;¹
 Or else, my greedy ear was wrong
 That turned two hundred into five.'

On reading this requisition the king burst into laughter and ordered that a thousand dinars be forthwith presented to the poet in the court.

¹ The literal translation of the Persian verse would be ' Or perhaps in the Turkish dialect the words *bish yuzaltun* means only two hundred dinars (not five hundred, as is generally understood) '.

A Grinding Stone-mill

ANOTHER poet, whose allowance was whittled down by officers of the royal treasury, was poet Qamari. On one occasion he received from the treasury only half the amount of his monthly stipend. The masterful bard brought the matter to the ears of the king by means of the following verses :

خداوندا شہا انعام عامت * کز و ماندست دشمن درتاسف
بسنگ آسیا ماند کہ نیمہ * روان کشتہ است و نیمہ درتوق

Oh prince ! Thy universal bounty,
The source of anguish to thy foes,
Is like a grinding stone-mill ;
Half the part in motion, the other half at rest.

Unsuri Sets the Fashion of Shingling!

THE student of Indian history does not need to be told how deeply Sultan Mahmud was attached to his slave Ayaz. A religious bigot and a terror to the 'infidels', as he is reported to have been, he revelled in drinking the life-blood of that great 'enemy' of Islam whose blood, according to the neat syllogism posed by Umar Khayyam in the following quatrain, it is absolutely lawful to drink :—

من مي خورم و مخالفان از چپ و راست
گویند مخور بادا که دین را اعداست *
چون دانستم که می عدوی دین است
والله بخورم خون عدو را که رواست *

I drink wine, and my opponents from right and left
exclaim :

‘Do not drink wine, for it is a foe of our creed !’

Now that I learn that wine is a foe of our creed,

By God ! I will drink the heart-blood of the enemy,
which is lawful forsooth !

One night, to borrow the words of the same poet, Mahmud had divorced old Reason and ‘taken the daughter of the Vine to spouse’. Not knowing what he was doing under the influence of liquor, he ordered Ayaz to cut off his ringlets. The poor lad promptly parted with two of his lovely curls and placed them before his master's feet. Next morning, when he realised what he had done, Mahmud was in a paroxysm

of grief. He sat moody and sulky; none of the courtiers had the courage to approach him. At last, his favourite poet laureate ventured to go near him. 'Come, Unsuri,' said the Sultan, 'I have been anxiously looking for you. Have you seen what misery I have brought upon myself? Can you think of any way of consoling me?' Unsuri, thereupon, instantaneously recited the following cheering verses:—

کي عیب سر زلف بت از کاستن است
 چه جای بغم نشستن و خاستن است *
 روز طرب و نشاط و می خواستن است
 کاراستن سر و ز پیراستن است *

'Though shame it be a fair one's curls to shear,
 Why rise in wrath or sit in sorrow here?
 Rather rejoice, make merry, call for wine,
 When clipped, the cypress doth most trim appear.'¹

This flash of genius immediately dispersed the clouds of anguish and anger. The Sultan was so pleased that he ordered that the mouth of the poet be thrice filled with jewels.

¹ As rendered by Browne, *Literary History of Persia*, Vol. II.

Short Nights in Spring

HERE is another anodyne for lovers of sweethearts with short ringlets. It derives its healing qualities from the genius of the poet laureate Mu'izzi:—

آن زلف مشکبار بر آن روی چون بهار
گر کوتاه است کوتاهی از او عجب مدار*
شب در بهار روی کند سوی کوتاهی
آن زلف چون شب آمد و آن روی چون بهار*

If the musk-scented ringlets on her fresh face like
spring

Be short ; it is in no way strange.

Her face is the spring and her ringlets the night,
And the nights during spring tend to be short.

What the Horse told the Poet

ONE day Sultan Mahmud was about to mount a horse which stumbled. The king received slight injuries. Unsuri happened to be there and he seized the opportunity of poetizing the incident. Naively he contrived to get the charger from the king by addressing to him the following verses :—

شاه ادا بی کن فلک بد خور * کافت برسانید رخ نیکو را
گر گوی غلط رفت بچوگانش زن * وراسپ خطا کرد بمن بخش او را

O Prince, teach thou a lesson to the perverse sky,
That to thy sweet face has brought such injury.
If a ball doth go astray, strike it with the bat,
But if a horse doth trip, make him over to me !

Greatly amused, the king presented Unsuri with the charger. A few days later, he asked the poet what he had done with the steed. This was the spontaneous reply :—

رفتم ببر اسپ تا بجرمش بکشم * گفتا بشنو نخست ابن عذر خورشم
نی گاو زمینم که جهان بر گیرم * نی چرخ چهارم که خورشید کشم

I went to the horse to kill him for his crime.

‘ Listen first,’ quoth he, ‘ to this *amende honourable* !

‘ I am not the earth-supporting Bull that I can uphold
the *World*,

‘ Nor am I the fourth sphere that I can support the
Sun !’

For this double compliment to the Sultan, who in one resplendent verse was compared to the *World* and in another to the *Sun*, the poet received a still more substantial reward.

Azraqi's Flight of Fancy

COMPARABLE to the magnificent performance of Unsuri in bringing solace to his royal master in the moment of grief was the achievement of poet Azraqi in quelling on one occasion the fury of Sultan Tughan Shah Saljuqi. When the monarch was once playing backgammon with one of his courtiers, he wished to have a double six but got two ones, the sixes being on the other side of the dice. The short-tempered Sultan was furious, whereupon Azraqi, who was present, composed there and then the following quatrain and asked the court musician to sing it :

کرشاه دوشش خواست و دو یک نقش افتاد
هان ظن نبی که کعبتین داد نداد *
آن نقش که کرده بود شاهنشاه یاد
در خدمت شاه روی بر خاک نهاد *

If the king desired double six, and the fling
resulted in two ones,

Listen ! Imagine not that the dice did not obey
him !

The points which the king of kings called to mind,
Came prostrating themselves before the Shah, with
their face to the earth !

Pleased with this ingenious explanation, the monarch
ordered that the Hakim's mouth be filled with jewels.

A Lesson in Humility

WHEN Sultan Mahmud conquered Samarcand and Transoxiana, he demanded tribute from five brothers among whom the province of Qabā in Turkistan had been portioned out after the death of their father. These *Pandavas* of Turkistan refused to acknowledge Mahmud's sovereignty and sent a swaggering reply in the following verses :—

ما پنج برادر از قبا ئیم * دریا دل و آفتاب را ئیم
ما ملک زمین همه گرفتیم * اکنون بتفکر سمائیم
گر چرخ بکام ما نگردد * چنبر ز همش فرو گشائیم

We are five brothers from Qabā,
Large-hearted as the ocean and radiant like the sun.
We have conquered all the kingdom of the world ;
And are now bent on the conquest of the heavens.
If they do not revolve according to our desire,
We'll put their wheels out of order !

To punish the braggarts the Sultan despatched a large army. At the same time he asked Unsuri to send them a crushing reply. The poet forthwith composed the following verses :—

نمروں بعد پور آذر * میگفت خدای خلق ما ئیم
جبار به نیم پشه او را * خوش داد سزا و ما گواہیم

Said Nimrod in the time of Abraham, the son of
Azar,

' I am the creator of the world ! '

Him the Almighty, with a tiny gnat,

Chastised most severely ; to this we bear witness.

On reading these lines, the roisterers came to their
senses and, striking an altogether different note, asked
for forgiveness :

ما پنج برادر از قبا ئیم * در قحط و نیاز مبتلا ئیم
شاهها تو عزیز مصر جودی * و اخوان گناهکار مائیم
ما را که بضاعتی است مزجات * شرمندۀ حضرت شما ئیم
بر حالت زار ما به بخشای * از فضل و کرم که بیفوا ئیم

We are five brothers from Qabā,

Grovelling in misery and humility.

O King, thou art the Joseph of the Egypt of
Generosity.

And we are like his guilty brothers.

We, whose capital stock is a trifle,

Stand ashamed in thy presence.

Extend thy generosity, and have mercy on our
wretched condition,

For we are possessed of nothing.

Umar Khayyam's Yearly Pension

ABSORBED in acquiring proficiency in knowledge of every kind, especially in astronomy, Umar Khayyam did not waste his poetic genius on panegyrics. Having secured a yearly pension of 1,200 *mithqals* of gold from the treasury of Nishapur, he had no need to flatter and fawn on royalty. Nishapur was the capital of Khurasan, which Mir Khond, the famous historian, described as 'the centre of the most cultivated, the most civilised, the pleasantest and the goodliest portion of the globe, the central gem of the necklace of the world.'

One of the greatest of the wise men of Khurasan was Imam Muwaffaq of Nishapur. It was a belief universal in the Province of the Sun that whoever read the Quran, or studied the Tradition with him, would rise to eminent positions. According to a widespread legend, presenting many chronological difficulties, Umar was one of his pupils. Hasan-e-Sabbah who subsequently became the head of the fanatic sect of the *Isma'ilians* and was known among the Crusaders as the 'Old Man of the Mountains', was another. Abu Ali al Hasan, who subsequently became the minister of the Saljuq king Alp Arsalan and of his son Malik Shah, was, according to the same legend, their companion. One day Hasan said to his two companions, 'It is the belief of every one that the pupils of the Imam will prosper. Even if we all are not so fortunate, at least one of us is sure to attain a high position. What, then, shall be our mutual pledge and bond?'

'Be it what you please,' said the other two.

'Let us then make a vow,' said Hasan, 'that if fortune smiles on any one of us, he shall share

it equally with the rest and reserve no pre-eminence for himself.'

'Be it so !' the other two responded.

Years passed by. None of them received a high office. At last, however, Abu Ali al Hasan rose to be the minister during the Sultanate of Alp Arsalan.¹ Hasan-e-Sabah thereupon approached Nizam u'l Mulk and obtained a place in the Government. Umar, too, went to his friend to claim his share in the good fortune of his friend, but title or office had no attraction for him. 'The greatest boon you can confer on me,' he said, 'is to let me live in a corner under the shadow of your fortune, to spread wide the benefits of science, and to pray for your long life and prosperity.' He was, accordingly, granted a yearly pension.

Umar thus lived a quiet life and died at Nishapur as an astronomer-poet and scholar ; but though he was not attached to any court, he could not be excluded from our roll of court poets, inasmuch as he was not only a government pensioner but also a recipient of royal favours. When Sultan Malik Shah decided to reform the Persian calendar, Umar was one of the eight learned men nominated to accomplish that difficult task. The result was the *Jalali* era, called after one of the king's names, Jalal u'd-din, a computation of time which, in the words of Gibbon, 'surpasses the Julian and approaches the accuracy of the Gregorian style.'

¹ It has been suggested that it was not the famous Nizam u'l Mulk, but Anushirwan b. Khalid, the less famous minister of the Saljuqi Prince Mahmud b. Malikshah. (*Vide Literary History of Persia*, Vol. II, pp. 191-92.) The fact remains, however, that Umar was one of the protégés of the great Nizam u'l Mulk, who was always a sincere friend of men of learning.

Prognostication of the Weather

THE following anecdote concerning Umar, given in the *Chahār Maqālā*,¹ establishes still more definitely the astronomer-poet's connection with the court. In the winter of A.H. 508 (A.D. 1114-15), Umar was asked to select a favourable time for the king to go hunting, 'such that therein should be no snowy or rainy days'. Umar made a careful choice and he himself went and saw the monarch mounting his horse at the auspicious moment. Very soon, however, the sky became overcast with clouds and snow and mist supervened. All present fell to laughing, and the king desired to turn back; but Umar said: 'Have no anxiety, for this very hour the clouds will clear away, and during these five days there will be not a drop of moisture.' So the king rode on, and the clouds opened, and during those five days there was no rain.

¹ Quoted by Browne in his *Literary History of Persia*, Vol. II.

Umar's Scepticism

BESIDES being a mathematician and an astronomer, Umar was a profound thinker. His contemplation of the two worlds, however, made him a sceptic. Failing to find any Providence but Destiny and any real world other than this, he sang :

گویند مرا بهشت با حور خوش است
من میگویم که آب انگور خوش است *
این نقد بگیر و دست از آن نسیه بدار
کاواز دهل شنیدن از دور خوش است *

'How sweet is mortal sovereignty'—think some,
Others—'How blest the paradise to come!'
Ah, take the Cash in hand and waive the Rest
Oh, the brave Music of a distant Drum! ¹

Again :

ای دوست بیا تا غم فردا نخوریم
وین یکدم تر را غنیمت شمریم *
فردا که از این دیر فنا در گذریم
با هفت هزار سالکان همسفریم *

'Ah my Beloved, fill the cup that clears
To-day of past Regrets and future Fears—
To-morrow?—Why to-morrow I may be
Myself with Yesterday's seven thousand years.'¹

¹ As rendered by Fitzgerald.

Learn Thou Humility, Ye Man of Learning!

IN the following verses the sceptic belittles all that science and philosophy teaches :—

هرچند دلم ز عشق محروم نشد * کم ماند ز اسرار که مفهوم نشد
واکنون که بچشم عقل در مینگرم * معلوم شد که هیچ معلوم نشد

So long as my heart was not deprived of love,
There remained few mysteries that I did not comprehend ;

But now, when I look at it with the eye of reason,
It is clear to me that nothing has been clear to me.

Probably this is one of the numerous 'wandering' quatrains ascribed to Umar Khayyam, but which is not really his. We find in the *Ātash Kada* the same quatrain with slight alterations assigned to Imam Fakhr-e-Razi, reminding the profoundest of scholars that even after life-long study and research they know precious little.

هرگز دل من ز علم محروم نشد
کم ماند ز اسرار که مفهوم نشد *
هفتاد و دو سال عمر حاصل کردم
معلوم شد که هیچ معلوم نشد *

Seldom did I miss an opportunity to gain knowledge,

There remained few mysteries that I did not comprehend ;

Yet at the age of three score years and twelve,

It is clear to me that nothing has been clear to me !

Here there is no revolt against science, but rather a frank acceptance of its limitations to prove the mysteries of the world, recalling the Bishop's words in Browning's *Bishop Blougram's Apology* :

'. . . cosmogony,
Geology, ethnology, what not,
(Greek endings with the little passing-bell
That signifies some faith's about to die.)'

From College to the Royal Court

WHEN Anwari was a student at the Mansuriya College in the city of Tus, as is the lot of scholars, want and indigence kept him company. One day, so runs the story, when he was sitting at the door of his college, he saw the retinue of Sultan Sanjar pass by. Seeing a man particularly well-dressed and mounted on a superb horse, surrounded by several attendants, the youth inquired who he was.

‘He is a poet,’ said those around him.

‘Good Heavens!’ he exclaimed, ‘The rank of science is so high, yet I am so poor! The place of poetry is so low, yet this man is so opulent! By the glory and splendour of the Lord of Glory, hereafter I will busy myself with poetry, which is the most insignificant of my accomplishments!’

That very night Anwari composed his famous *qasida* in praise of Sanjar.

In forging his way to the royal presence the poet had to resort to a stratagem. Though apocryphal, the anecdote gives one an idea of the intrigues in such courts. It was the policy of the all-powerful and selfish poet laureate of Sultan Sanjar, Mu‘izzi,¹ to present to the king none but poets of mediocre ability, who were in no way likely to eclipse him. If a first-rate poet contrived to find his way to the court, this ‘king-poet’ knew how to send him away disgraced. It is said that he had so good a memory that on hearing a poem for the first time he could recite it from beginning to end. His son could

¹ According to another narrative, Abu’l Faraj.

perform the same feat, after the second reading, and his slave could repeat the miracle on hearing the poem for the third time! Whenever a new and unwelcome poet submitted a *qasida*, Mu'izzi would say, 'This is my own composition; in proof of what I say, hear me recite it.' Then, when he had repeated it from memory, he would call upon his son, and then his slave, to repeat it, with the result that the confounded author of the original poem had to leave the court thoroughly humiliated and discredited! Knowing the trick Mu'izzi was likely to play, Anwari appeared before that prodigy as a half-witted, shabbily dressed versifier and asked for his kind offices in securing the favour of the king's audience. 'Recite the poem,' said the poet laureate. Anwari solemnly recited the first couplet—

زهی شاه وزهی شاه وزهی شاه
 زهی میروزی میروزی میروزی میروزی *

Bravo King! Bravo King! Bravo King!
 Bravo Amir! Bravo Amir! Bravo Amir!

Mu'izzi could not suppress his laughter and he suggested, patronisingly, that the second line might read thus, so as to rhyme with the first—

زهی ماه وزهی ماه وزهی ماه

What a moon! What a moon! What a moon!

'No, no,' said Anwari, 'that will not do; don't you know that the King and the Amir (nobleman) are inseparably associated?' Such tomfoolery obviated suspicion. Greatly under-estimating the worth of the poet, Mu'izzi consented to present him to the Sultan on

the following day. Anwari went punctually to the court, well dressed and well groomed, and was permitted to recite his panegyric. The very first line thrilled the audience.

گر دل و دست بحر و کان باشد
دل و دست خدا یگان باشد *

If Heart and Hand can rank as Sea and Mine,
It is, O Sire, the Heart and Hand of thine !

After having recited a few verses, he paused and, turning to the poet laureate, said : ‘ This is how my poem begins ; if you claim that it is yours, kindly recite the lines that follow ; if not, allow me to proceed.’ Mu‘izzi realised that he had been over-reached. He dared not claim the authorship of the masterpiece. Anwari then recited the *qasida* to the end. That single panegyric turned out to be a passport for the poet from the college to the court.

Only a Twittering Swallow!

A DWARF in stature, poet Rashidu'd-din Watwat was a giant in ready wit and satire. *Watwat*, in Persian, means a *swallow*, and this nickname fitted Rashidu'd-din very well, as he had a long tongue though a stunted figure. He hailed from Balkh, but was brought up at Samarqand and flourished during the time of Atsiz Khwarizm Shah. On one occasion, says Dawlatshah in his *Memoirs of the Poets*, Watwat was engaged in a heated argument in an assembly. An ink-bottle stood before him; so Atsiz, who was greatly amused at the tumultuous flow of words from so small a reservoir, exclaimed in jest: 'Take away that ink-bottle so that we may see who is behind it!' Watwat forthwith sprang to his feet and quoted the Arabic adage: 'A man is a man by virtue of the two tiniest parts of his body, his heart and his tongue!'

Atsiz, who was governor of the Province of Khwarizm, once raised the banner of independence. Sultan Sanjar, therefore, came down upon him with a large army. The rebellious satrap sought safety in flight, but having fortified himself in the stronghold of Hazar Asp he sent the following defiant message to Sultan Sanjar:

مرا با ملک طاقت جدت نیست

* بصلحش مرا نیز آهنگ نیست

ملک شهریار است و شاه جهان

* گریز از چنین پادشه ندگت نیست *

اگر باد پایست یکران شاه
 کمیت مرا نیز پالنگ نیست *
 بخوارزم آید بسقسین روم
 خدای جهان را جهان تنگ نیست *

Strength have I not to fight with the king,
 Nor the desire to sue for peace.
 A mighty monarch and the ruler of the world is he ;
 Fleeing from such a king is no infamy.
 Though swift is the steed the Shah bestrides,
 My poor pony is not lame in his feet.
 The king comes to Khwarizm, I go to Saqsin ;
 Wide is the world for the King of the World.

Sultan Sanjar followed Atsiz to the fortress and laid siege to it. Anwari, who was then in the camp of Sanjar, wrote on a piece of paper the following lines in praise of the Sultan and flung the missile, fastened to an arrow, into the fortress of the rebel prince :

ای شاه همه ملک جهان حسب تر است
 و از دولت و اقبال شهی کسب تر است *
 امروز بیک حمله هزار اسب بگیر
 فردا خوارزم و صد هزار اسب تر است *

O King, all the Kingdom of the world belongs to thee,
 By the grace of God the station of sovereignty is thine.
 Capture to-day (the fortress of) *Hazar-Asp* with a single assault,
 To-morrow, Khwarizm and a hundred thousand horses shall be thine !

Here is a play on the name of the fortress *Hazar-Asp*, which means, literally, a thousand horses. The words صد هزار اسب in the last line would, therefore, mean 'a hundred fortresses like *Hazar-Asp*', or 'a hundred thousand horses as part of the booty.'

On the other side there was *Watwat* to inspirit *Atsiz*. As a rejoinder he shot back on another arrow the following spirited verses :

شاهها که بجایست می صاف نیست نه درد
 اعدای تو را ز غصه خون باید خورد *
 گر خصم تو ای شاه بود رستم گرد
 یک خر ز هزار اسب نتواند برد *

' O Prince whose cup contains pure wine, not dregs,
 While thy foes, through grief, drink blood ;
 Even were thine enemy the lion-hearted *Rustom*
 himself,
 Not a single ass from *Hazar-Asp* could he take away ! '

Sanjar was furious when he received this challenge and swore that if ever the impudent rhymester fell into his hands, he would have him cut into seven pieces. Eventually, the fortress was captured. *Atsiz* again took flight ; and *Watwat* concealed himself. He had, however, a friend in *Najibu'd-din Munshi*, the Sultan's secretary, who wrote on his behalf a petition submitting, in all humility, that *Watwat* was merely a tiny bird whom it would hardly be possible to cut into two pieces, much less into seven.¹ Amused by this

¹ According to another account the intercession took the form of a prayer in these words : ' O King, I have a request to prefer. *Watwat* is a feeble little bird and cannot bear to be divided into seven pieces ; order him, then, to be merely cut into two ! '

remark, the Sultan granted the chirping sparrow a new lease of life. Some say that it was Anwari who interceded on behalf of his gifted rival.

Many are the anecdotes showing how often the ready wit of court poets was successful in cooling the ire of irate monarchs, but before we relate a few of these, another story of a battle of words, in which the 'little swallow' was worsted, is worth re-telling.

Who Was the Greater Blockhead?

ONE day Watwat called on poet Adib Sabir. It was then snowing, and Sabir did not wish to be disturbed. He asked his servant to tell Watwat that he was not at home. Watwat was greatly annoyed and exclaimed :

آنکس که برون رود در این روز
کودن تر از او دگر کسی نیست *

Whoever goes out on a day like this,
Is the greatest blockhead in the world.

On hearing these words, Sabir, who, too, was an old bird, yielding to none, in warbling impromptu notes, put out his head from the window and said :

من خود بحرم سرای خویشم
پیداست که از برون در کیست *

Inside the harem of my house am I !
'Tis obvious who's outside the door, thou or I ?

Dawlatshah observes that these two poets attacked each other in satires of such coarseness as to forbid reproduction in his Memoirs of the Poets. What he could not do in his days we dare not do to-day.

Striking at a Gnat

A STORY analogous to that of the royal decree to sever 'the twittering swallow' into seven is that of Shah Bahramshah and his associates taken captive in a battle. The enraged monarch sentenced them to death. Among them was Sayyid Ashrafu'd-din Hasan, son of the poet Nasir Alawi, who prostrated himself before the king and recited the following verses:—

آني که فلک به پيش تيغت ناید
بخشش بجز از کف چو ميغت ناید *
زخم تو که پيل کوه پيکر نکشد
برپشه همي زني دريغت ناید *

Thou art he whose sword even the sky cannot
withstand,
Except from thy palm, resembling the rain-cloud,
gifts do not rain.
Thy blow which even the mountain-like elephant
cannot bear
Thou inflictest on a gnat! Feelest thou no
compunction?

Deeply impressed, the Sultan spared the lives of the prisoners and raised Sayyid Ashrafu'd-din to the rank of a courtier.

Extempore Verses Open Prison Doors!

FOR some fault poet Rukn-e-Sayen was once put in irons by Tughan Timur Khan. One day he contrived to be taken, with fetters on, to the Khan, and asked for pardon. 'If you recite some fine verses appropriate to the occasion,' said the Khan, 'I will release you.' Thereupon, that expert in extemporization chanted the following verses :—

در خدمت شاه چون قوی شد رایم
گفتم که رکاب را ز زر فرمایم *
آهن چو شنید این سخن از دهنم
در تاب فداد و حلقه زد در پایم *

When to present myself to the king my desire
grew firm,

I said to myself, 'I would have stirrups made of
gold.'

When these words were heard by Iron,

It burnt with anger and coiled itself round my
legs !

A Question of Decorum

HOW the ready wit of a poet once turned the question of defiance of royal orders into one of decorum is related in the story of Nasru'd-din, head of the tribe of 'Kabud Jamah'. Sultan Takash once issued orders that Nasru'd-din should be executed and his head taken to the Sultan. Having a very persuasive tongue, Nasru'd-din prevailed upon the king's agent to take him alive to the Sultan's court. Seeing him alive, the king was indignant. Nasru'd-din, however, easily dispersed the clouds that threatened to break over his head. Inventing a delectable excuse for still carrying his head over his shoulders, he conveyed it to the Sultan in the following verses :

من خاک تو در چشم خرد می آرم
عذرت نه یکی نه ده نه صد می آرم *
سر خواسته بدست کس نتوان داد
می آیم و بر گردن خود می آرم *

The dust under thy feet I apply to the eye of
wisdom,
Not one, not ten, but a hundred apologies I bring.
Not to any one can be trusted the head demanded
by the king ;
Myself I come and myself I bring it on my neck
(to lay it before thy feet)!

The enraged monarch was thus instantaneously pacified. Embracing the gifted prisoner, he granted him pardon and raised him to the position of a high officer in the service of the State.

A Poet's Defiance of a Monarch's Threat

SOFT words break iron fetters, but there are intrepid souls who, even with fetters on, delight in giving and receiving hard knocks. Of such a frame of mind was Khwaja Amir Beg. When Abdu'llah Khan Uzbek occupied Khurasan, he sent to that poet, who had been imprisoned in a fortress under the orders of Shah Tamasp Safawi, a note containing this verse :

اي خواجه بعد از اين طمع از زندگي بپر
ز آنرو که گشته مسند خاني مقام ما *

Oh Khwajah, abandon hereafter all hope of life,
To us now belongs the throne of royalty.

Nothing daunted, Amir Beg, who combined in spirit the soldier and the singer, sent the following rejoinder :

اي باد اگر باهل خراسان گذر کنی
زنهار عرضه ده بر ایشان پیام ما *
وانکه بگو براه وفا آن گروه را
کي گشته کینه خواه شما خاص و عام ما *
کلک غرور و جهل شما ثبت کرده بود
در رقعۀ که بود در آن رقعۀ نام ما *
کاي خواجه بعد از اين طمع از زندگي بپر
ز آنروکه گشته مسند خاني مقام ما *
اي مدعي مگر نشنيدی که ميرسد
شاه سقاره خيل و سپهر احتشام ما *

باشد جواب دعوي خاني كه كردۀ
 بيتي كه گفته حافظ شيرين كلام ما *
 چندان بود كرسمه و ناز سهي قدان
 كاید بجلوه سر و صوبه خرام ما *

Oh breeze, shouldst thou pass by Khurasan,
 Convey to its residents this message from us.
 Tell that band of people by way of fidelity,
 Oh ye, on whom our population, high and low, have
 vowed vengeance,
 The pen of your conceit and ignorance has
 written,
 In a note containing a message for us :
 ' Oh Khwajah, abandon hereafter all hope of life,
 To us now belongs the throne of royalty ! ' ¹
 Oh vain pretender ! hast thou not heard of the
 arrival of our king
 With a force countless as the stars and resplen-
 dent as the skies above ?
 The best answer to thy pretensions to royalty
 Is the couplet of our sweet-tongued Hafiz :
 ' The coquetry and blandishment of the tall dam-
 sels will last
 Only till the arrival of our Cypress¹ with her
 graceful gait ! ' ¹

An Intrepid Vizier

The same poet-prince received another rebuff in
 verse from a witty Vizier of his own court. When
 Abdu'llah Khan visited the tomb of Rustam, the national

¹ An expression common in Persian poetry signifying a beauty.

hero of Iran, he tried to impress those present with the solemnity of the occasion by this poetical effusion :

سر از خاک بردار و ایران به بین
بکام دلیران توران بد بین *

Raise thy head from the dust; behold this land of Iran !

See how in bondage she bends to the brave sons of Turan !

‘ I know,’ said the minister, ‘ what Rustam’s reply would be.’

‘ What, pray, would be the reply?’ asked Abdu’llah somewhat scornfully.

‘ Rustam’s reply,’ observed the Vizier, ‘ would be :

چو بیشه تهی ماند از نرّه شیر
شغالان به بیشه در آید دلیر *

“ When lions gallant desert the wood,
Boldly the jackals dash there for prey ! ”

According to another account, it was Timur who thus boasted of the exploits of the Turanians and it was his Vizier who promptly retorted :

گذشتند شیران ازین مرغزار
کند روبه لنگ اینجا شکار *

Gone are the lions from this wood,
Leaving lame foxes to prowl for prey.

Drinking to a Poet's Blindness!

‘**A**TTAR was the soul (of Sufi philosophy) and Sanai its two eyes; I came after both Sanai and Attar.’

In these words Jalalu'd-din Rumi, the greatest of the triad of Sufi poets, proclaims to the world the eminence of Sanai who, besides being famous as a man of letters and delightful manners, was held in high esteem as a Sufi philosopher.

Like other court poets, Sanai, who was a native of Ghazna, had waited on princes and sung their praises. One day, however, he suddenly decided to retire from the world and to seek salvation in seclusion. The reason for this conversion is given in the following anecdote.

When Sultan Ibrahim of Ghazna decided upon launching an attack on the idolaters in India, Sanai composed a poem in his praise and hastened to the court to present it to the monarch. While he was passing through a garden, Sanai heard some one singing and stopped to listen. The singer was a *diwānah*, known in Ghazna as *Lai Khur* (mud-eater), one of the class of religious mendicants who moved about from place to place as maniacs, but of whom it might safely be said that there was method in their madness. Addressing the cup-bearer, the man said: ‘Saki, fill a bumper that I may drink to the blindness of Sultan Ibrahim!’ The Saki protested and said it would be a sin to wish that such a calamity should befall a good and just king. The *diwānah* insisted that the monarch deserved to be blind for his stupidity in leaving so fine a city as Ghazna, which needed his presence and attention, and in going, despite the severity of winter, on a fool's errand.

Lai Khur then asked the Saki to fill another cup so that he might drink to the blindness of Hakim Sanai. Greatly annoyed, the cup-bearer once more remonstrated against such a malediction and said, 'Don't you know how dearly our people love and respect the poet?' Lai Khur, however, contended that Sanai merited the curse even more than the king inasmuch as, notwithstanding his knowledge and scholarship, he appeared to be altogether ignorant of the purpose for which he had been created and of his mission in life. 'When (tomorrow) he will have to appear before his Maker,' scornfully observed the inspired maniac, 'and when he will be asked what he brings with him, he shall have to say, "I bring only panegyrics—nothing more!"'

These words made a deep and lasting impression on the philosopher-poet. All the wishes and vanities of life now appeared to him to be inanities. Sultan Ibrahim wished to give the poet his sister in marriage, but renouncing the world he proceeded on a pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina. After his return, he composed the *Hadiqah*, or Enclosed Garden, and confined his composition to themes of devotion and sanctity.

A Dervish's Admonition to Attar

A SIMILAR story is related concerning the renunciation of the world by another mystic poet, Faridu'd-din Attar. In his youth Attar followed the profession of his father, who was a wealthy and respected druggist of Nishapur. According to Dawlatshah, the famous biographer, Attar was sitting one day at the door of his shop when a *dervish*, or religious mendicant, approached him. Gazing at the well-furnished shop and inhaling the sweet scent of the varied herbs and perfumes exhibited in it, the mendicant heaved a deep sigh and began to shed tears. He was, apparently, moved by the thought of the instability of human life. Attar, however, asked the man to move on.

‘ Yes,’ said he, ‘ there is nothing to prevent me from leaving your door, or, forsooth, from bidding good-bye to this world. My only possession in the world is this worn-out garment. I can give it up any moment, but, oh Attar, I grieve for thee! How, indeed, canst thou ever bring thyself to think of death, leaving all these worldly possessions behind thee? ’

Deeply agitated by these words, Attar gave up his business, retired from the world, became a disciple of the famous Shaikh Ruknu'd-din, and devoted himself to the study of Sufi philosophy.

‘The Sultan of Savants’

ONE of the most eminent poets of Iran, who had little to do with the darbar of any potentate, was Jalalu'd-din Rumi, the author of the far-famed *Mathnawi*. If not by association, at least by lineage, he had a direct connection with royalty, his grand-mother being the daughter of Alau'd-din, one of the Khwarizmian rulers. Many are the flattering titles conferred by an admiring nation on its favourite poets, but no appellation of dignity was ever more richly deserved than that of *Sultan ul 'Ulama*, or the Sultan of Savants, bestowed on this eminent poet, mystic, scholar and philosopher. Jalalu'd-din was, besides, the founder of the order of dancing dervishes, and the assemblies he held as the spiritual guide and preceptor of his numerous disciples were in no way inferior to the courts of princes.

One of the doctrines of the Sufis of the age in which Jalalu'd-din lived was that the traveller on the mystic path must choose a *pir* to guide him. Therefore, Jalalu'd-din, although himself a prince among the poets and thinkers of the day, chose as his *pir* Shamsu'd-din of Tabriz, a man of singular learning and sanctity. Attached to him passionately, the great Sufi master practically surrendered his convictions and desires to the domineering faith and imperious will of his spiritual guide. According to all reports, Shamsu'd-din appears to have fascinated all around him. Aflaki tells us that the sage demanded and received the homage due to a Sultan from the meanest of his slaves. The following couplet in one of the *ghazals* addressed

by Jalalu'd-din to Shams i Tabriz affords a typical illustration :—

آن پادشاه اعظم در بسته بود محکم * پوشیده دلق آدم امروز بر در آمد

That august king had shut the door fast ;
To-day he has come to the door, clad in the
raiment of mortality.

Jalal Hypnotized

Another anecdote given in the *Manāqib u'l Ārifin* also gives an idea of the pretensions of Jalal's idol. One day a man met Shams i Tabriz and exclaimed : ' There is no god save God ; Shamsu'd-din is the apostle of God.' There was much commotion when people heard those words ; the infuriated mob wished to kill the man who indulged in such blasphemy, but Shams intervened and led him away, coolly remarking : ' My good friend, my name is Muhammad. Thou shouldst have shouted, " Muhammad is the apostle of God." The crowd will not take the gold that is not coined.'

Howsoever astounding his friend's pretensions, Jalalu'd-din was so hypnotized by him that renouncing his mission as the spiritual guide of a multitude of disciples, he retired with Shams to the desert. Jalal's followers were greatly enraged at what they regarded as an attempt to seduce their beloved master from the true faith. Fearing violence, Shams fled for safety to Tabriz. Thence he went to Damascus and stayed there for two years. The anguish of separation was so galling to Jalal that he sent his son, Sultan Walad, to Damascus to bring Shams back. Soon after his return, however, Shams disappeared mysteriously ; people believed that he had been put to death.

It was during the separation of the two great masters that most of the *ghazals* addressed to Shams i Tabriz were composed by Jalalu'd-din. Here is a specimen :

باز آمد آن مهی که ندیدش فلک بخواب
 آورد آتشی که نمیرد به هیچ آب *
 بنگر بخانه تن و بنگر بجان من
 از جام عشق او شده این مست و آن خراب *
 میر شـرانجانه چو شد با دلم حریف
 خونم شراب گشت ز عشق و دلم کباب *
 چون دیده پر شود ز خیالش ندا رسد
 کاحسنت ای پیاله و شـاباش ای شراب *
 جنکال عشق از یُن و از بیخ بر کند
 هر خانه کاندراو فتد از عشق آفتاب *
 دریای عشق را جو دلم دید ناگهان
 از من بجست دروی و گفتا مرا بیاب *
 خورشید روی مفرز تبریز شـمس دین
 اندر پیش روان شده دلای چون سحاب *

That moon, which the sky ne'er saw even in
 dreams, has returned
 And brought a fire no water can quench.
 See the body's house, and see my soul,
 This made drunken and that desolate by the cup
 of his love.

When the host of the tavern became my heart-
 mate,
 My blood turned to wine and my heart to grill.
 When the eye is filled with thought of him,
 a voice arrives :
 ‘ Well done, O flagon, and bravo, O wine ! ’
 Love’s fingers tear up, root and stem,
 Every house where sunbeams fall from love.
 When my heart saw love’s sea, of a sudden
 It left me and leaped in, crying, ‘ Find me ! ’
 The face of Shamsi-Din Tabriz’s glory, is the sun
 In whose track the hearts are moving like clouds.¹

¹ Selected poems from *Divan-i-Shamsi Tabriz* by Dr. Reynold Nicholson,
 No. VII.

A Shepherd Boy Becomes a Court Poet

اشتر صراحی کردند * دانه چه خوابی کردند
کردن درازا می کنی * پنبه نخوابی خوردن

Flask-necked camels, hence ! Get out !
Well I know what you're about !
Those long necks which forward crane
Shall not touch my cotton-grain !¹

THUS did the shepherd boy, tending a cotton field in a lowly village of Khurasan, apostrophize the intruding camels, unconscious of the fact that the Saljuqi monarch, Sultan Sanjar, was approaching the field. Pleased with such a manifestation of poetic talent, the Sultan took the lad to the court and gave him a liberal education. Thanks to the royal favour, Abdu'l Wasi, for that was the lad's name, became an adept in the art of stringing pearls of poetry, both in Arabic and Persian, and acquired name and fame as a master of panegyric under the pen-name Jabali (The Highlander).

Jami quotes with warm appreciation the following specimen of his verses :

دردم نیست از تو دل افروز تر نگار
در شهر نیست از تو جگر سوز تر پسر *
تا کرده ام به لاله سیراب تو نگاه
تا کرده ام بفرکس پر خواب تو نظر *

¹ Browne's translation, *Literary History of Persia*, Vol. II.



دَآهِي چو لاله ام ز وصالَت شگفتَه روي
 دَآهِي چو نرگسَم ز فراقت فکندَه سر *

There is no beauty in the world more heart-kindling than thou ;

In this city there is no youth more soul-consuming than thou.

Since I have beheld thy countenance, glistening like the Tulip fresh with dew,

Since I have witnessed thy eyes, like Narcissus drowsy with sleep,

Sometimes I am like the Tulip, with face radiant with rapture at (the thought of) thy presence ;

Sometimes I am like the Narcissus, drooping my head in anguish at thy absence.

Quarrel Over a Pen-Name

RENOWNED for the excellence of his verses in which, it was said, he combined the fire of Amir Khusrau, the delicacy of Hasan, the wit of Kamal and the diction of Hafiz, poet Amir Shahi was an intimate companion of Prince Baysanger. Despite their intimacy, however, the prince could not reconcile himself to the assumption by the poet of a pen-name connoting sovereignty. He, therefore, asked Shahi to adopt another *nom de guerre*, but that Sultan of the realm of poetry refused to do so and soon afterwards ceased visiting the court.

It is said that at the darbar of one of the princes some one was given precedence over Shahi. The poet resented this indignity in the following verses :

شاهها مدار چرخ فلک تا هزار سال * چون من یگانه نغمه‌ایم به صد هنر
گر زیر دست هر کس و خاکس نشانیم * آنجا لطیفه‌ایست بدانم من اینقدر
بحرست مجلس تو در بحر بیخلاف * لؤلؤ بریز باشد و خاشاک بر زبر

O king, for a thousand years the heavens in their
revolutions

Have not produced a man so unique and gifted
like me.

If thou doth assign to me a seat lower than that
of any and everybody,

There is a subtlety underlying it, I trow ;

Thy court is an ocean and in it, without doubt,

Pearls are at the bottom and light chaff at the top.

Keep Thy Silver to Thyself!

DAWLATSHAH is warm in his praises of Prince Baysanger who, alike for his own literary talents and for his encouragement of men of learning, was famous throughout the East. It is said that forty calligraphers were busy copying in his library the manuscripts of scholars and men of parts who had been drawn to his capital. 'Of the kings of all times since Khusraw Parwiz,' says the biographer, 'none lived so joyous and splendid a life as Baysanger Sultan.' It is related that on several occasions Sultan Ibrahim requested Baysanger to send to his court at Shiraz the famous minstrel Yusuf of Andakan. With the last application a hundred thousand dinars in cash were sent, but Baysanger, who could himself play the poet, sent the following reply :

ما يوسف خود نمی فروشیم * توسیم سیاه خود نگیدار

We will not sell our Yusuf,
Keep thy black silver to thyself !

A Thrilling Threnody

‘ONE night, by the decree of the Lord of Lords, through excess of wine,’ the prince was overwhelmed by the deep sleep of death. Many a threnody was composed by the poets of the court, but the following quatrain of Shahi is the best :

در ماتم تو دهر بسی شایون کرد * لاله همه خون دیده در دامن کرد
گل جیب قبای ارغوانی بدید * قمری نمیدی سیاه در گردن کرد

In mourning for thee the World was plunged in
grief ;

The Tulip bedewed its skirt with the blood of its
eyes (tears of blood) ;

The Rose rent the collar of its crimson robe ;

The Turtle-dove clothed its neck in ‘pitch-dark
felt.

The Apparel doth Not Make the Man

ANOTHER poet who, growing tired of court life, sought solace in seclusion was Zahiru'd-din Tahir, known by his poetic name Faryabi, derived from Faryab, the place from which he hailed. He is one of those unfortunate bards in whose poems Browne sees nothing more than 'the same polished, graceful, rather insipid' kind of verses characteristic of the panegyrists of the courts of Iran. Browne was not unaware of the tribute paid by Dawlatshah to the poet in the following well-known verse :

دیوان ظہیر فاریابی * در کعبہ بدزد اگر بیایی

Steal the Diwan of Zahir-i-Faryabi,
Even shouldst thou find it in the Ka'ba !

Nevertheless, Browne quotes several verses to show that this poet had regarded court poetry as a mere money-making business and that he was 'an importunate beggar.' The greed for gold, however, gave way, towards the evening of the poet's life, to study and devotion.

Zahir was attached to the court of the Saljuqi prince Tughan Shah, and one of his best panegyrics was composed in praise of that king. Proceeding to Azarbaijan, he enjoyed the patronage of Atabeg Muzaffaru'd-din Muhammad and of his successor, Atabeg Qizil Arsalan. The king's nephew, Nusratu'd-din Abu Bakr, tried to inveigle him away from Qizil Arsalan's court and at last succeeded. Qizil Arsalan thereupon

bestowed his favours on Mujiru'd-din Baylaqani, who was Zahir's rival. Every week the prince sent Mujir a new dress of honour made of silk and brocade and Mujir affected the fine clothes, with great pride, to the disgust of the learned men of the court. Zahir's sneer on such a display of clothes was clothed in a poet's fancy :

گر بدیدهای فاخر آدمی گردد کسی
 پس در اطلس چیست گرگ و در عبائی سوسمار *

If with beautiful clothes a nobody becomes
 somebody,

Then what is a wolf dressed in satin and an
 alligator in Abbāi? ¹

¹ A coarse cloth which serves as an overcoat.

Khaqani's Disgust of Court Life

ONE of the most famous panegyrists was Afzalu'd-din Ibrahim of Shirwan, originally known as Haqa'iqi, but later as Khaqani. His father was a carpenter, and his mother, a Nestorian Christian converted to Islam, and believed to have been a cook by profession. Orphaned at an early age, he was left entirely to the care of his uncle, who for seven years acted 'both as nurse and tutor' to him and taught him Arabic, medicine, astronomy and mathematics. His skill in versification he owed, however, to Abu'l Ula of Ganja, one of the poets of the court of Minuchihr Shirwanshah, who gave him his daughter in marriage. The young poet was introduced in due course to the prince with whose permission he changed his pen-name from Haqa'iqi to Khaqani.

The life of a court poet soon palled on Khaqani. Disgusted with it, he expressed his determination to retire from the world altogether and to live like a dervish, but the king would not give him permission to go. Khaqani, therefore, ran away from the court. He was, however, captured by the Sultan's officers and imprisoned in a fortress for seven months. On his release he attached himself once more to the court of the Sultan, but at last he obtained permission to renounce the world, and proceeded on a pilgrimage to Mecca.

The following famous couplet was composed by him in praise of poverty :

پس از سی سال روشن شد بر خاقانی این معنی
که سلطانیست درویشی و درویشیست سلطانی *

After thirty years dawned on Khaqani this verity
That sovereignty is poverty and poverty sover-
eignty.

Outrageous as it might appear, it is nevertheless true that the same high-souled poet was engaged in a bitter quarrel with his master and teacher Abu'l Ula, which was marked by a series of abusive poems in which the senior master of the craft appeared to have scored over Khaqani with the following scurrilous lines :

خاقانیا اگرچه سخن نیک دانیا
یک نکته کویمت بشنو رایگانیا *
هجو کسی ممکن که ز تو مه بود بس
باشد که او پدر بودت تو ندانیا *

Thy verse, Khaqani, deeply I admire,
Yet one small hint to offer, I desire :
Mock not the man whose years outnumber thine :
He may, perchance (thou know'st not), be thy
Sire !

Salman-e-Sawaji's Royal Pupils

‘THE pomegranate of Simnan and the poetry of Salman are not to be found anywhere in the world.’

These words of Alau'd-din Simnani have passed into a proverb. Poet Salman, indeed, deserves the compliment. He is regarded by his countrymen as one of the greatest masters of the art of poesy, who, moreover, stood head and shoulders above his peers by reason of his general accomplishment and proficiency in mathematics and other sciences.

While Salman was travelling in the Arabian Irak, he halted at Baghdad. There he happened to meet Sultan Amir Shaikh Hasan and his beautiful and accomplished queen, Dilshad Khatun. Both took great delight in Salman's company. The Sultan became his disciple and also entrusted his eldest son, Sultan Uwais, to his care. Both father and son studied poetry under him and this fact alone was sufficient to make the poet famous throughout Asia.

Story of a Candlestick

ONE night Salman sat up with Sultan Uwais later than usual, little realising, under the influence of wine, how old Time was flying. When at last he got up to return home, the prince ordered a chamberlain to accompany the poet to his house, and to take a candlestick with him, as it was a dark night. On reaching his room, Salman expressed the desire that the candlestick might be left there for the time being. Next morning the chamberlain went to the poet's house to take it back. Instead of returning it, however, Salman addressed to the prince the following couplet; doubtless, a gem more precious than a candlestick made of gold !

شمع خود سوخت شب دوش و بزاري امروز

گر لگن مي طلبد شاه ز من مي سوزم *

Last night the candle burnt itself away in shedding tears of sorrow (at our separation);

To-day, if the prince demands the candlestick, I shall be consumed likewise.

A Brilliant Feat

ON one occasion when Salman presented himself before Amir Shaykh Hasan, ruler of Baghdad, the Amir was practising archery. A slave, named *Sa'adat* (Good Fortune), collected the discharged arrows and brought them back to the prince. On seeing Salman, the Amir asked him to compose some verses celebrating the occasion. That born improvisator readily chanted the following marvellous verses :

چو در جوف چاچي کمان رفت ششاه
تو گوئي که در برج قوس است ماه *
دو زاغ کمان با عقاب سه پر
بدیدم به یک گوشه آورده سر *
نپادند سر بر سر دوش شاه
ندانم چه گفتند در کوش شاه *
چو از شست بگشاد خسرو گره
بر آمد زهر گوشه آواز زه *
شها تیر در بند تدبیر تست
سعادت دوان در پی تیر تست *
بعهدت ز کس ناله بر نخاست
بغیر از کمان گر بذلد رواست *
که در عهد سلطان صاحب قران
نکردست کس زور جز بر کمان *

When the king entered the cavity of 'the Chachi bow,'

One might have said, 'the moon had entered the zodiacal sign of the Bow (Sagittarius)!'

I saw the two crows (corner ends) of the bow and the three-winged eagle (the arrow with three feathers),

Laying their heads together in a corner.

They placed their heads on the shoulder of the king, But I know not what they whispered in his ears.

When the king let go the grip from the thumbstall, There arose from every corner the sound of 'Bravo'!

O Prince, (the Planet) Mercury is in the noose of thy command,

Good Fortune runs after thy arrows.

In thy reign, no wail ever arose from any one,

Except from the Bow, which, if it moans, is natural;

For in the reign of the auspicious king

None useth force save on the Bow!

Rustam's Bow

The reference to the Chachi bow, with the wealth of detail presented in this picture, brings to mind the most magnificent verses in which Firdawsi vividly describes the duel between Rustam and Ashkabus, with similar deftness and brilliance of artistry. Rustam rubs the Chachi bow all over with his hand, roars like a panther, moves his hand to the quiver-belt and selects an arrow of white poplar. Inserting his thumb in the cavity of the bow, he makes a pillar of the left hand and bends the right; the Chachi bow creaks as it bends. When the arrow-head comes up to the ear, the leather begins to squeak; as soon as he lets go the grip, the arrow passes through the backbone of Ashkabus. That very

moment the Heavens kiss Rustam's hand. Fate says, 'Receive!' and Death says, 'Inflict.' The Heavens say, 'Bravo!' and the Angels, 'Well done!' Salman must have had before his eyes that stirring scene in the Shah-Nama when he came out with his dazzling impromptu. Here are the verses of Firdawsi :

کمان را بمالید رستم بچنگ
 بغزید مانند شران پلنگ *
 پس آنکه به بند کمر برد چنگ
 گزین کرد یک چو به تیر خدنگ *
 خدنگی بر آورد پیگان چو آب
 نهاده بر او چار پر عقاب *
 بمالید چاچی کمان را بدست
 به چرم گوزن اندر آورد شست *
 ستون کرد چپ را و خم کرد راست
 خروش از خم چرخ چاچی بخاست *
 جو سوافارش آمد به پهنای گوش
 ز چرم گوزنان بر آمد خروش *
 چو پیگان ببوسید انگشت او
 گذر کرد از مهره پشت او *
 چو زد تیر بر سینه اشکبوس
 سپهر آنزمان دست او داد بوس *
 قضا گفت کبیر و قدر گفت ده
 فلک گفت احسن ملک گفت زه *

The Biter Bit

ONE of the remarkable parodists and satirists of Iran, perhaps the most gifted, was Ubayd-i-Zakani. Being also an adept in ribaldry, he played havoc with the serious verses of earlier and contemporary poets. No wonder he offended many.

Once Salman was provoked to indite this scathing epigram against Zakani :

جهنمی و مہجاءو عبید زاکانی
مقرر است بہ بیدولتی و بیدینی *
اگرچہ نیست ز قزوین و روستا زادست
ولیک میشود اندر حدیث قزوینی *

Ubayd Zakani, the accursed satirist,
Doubtless possesses neither wealth nor religion ;
Though he does not come from Qazwin, and is a
mere rustic,
Yet he is taken universally to be a Qazwini.

The people of Qazwin were unjustly reputed to be the most stupid in Iran. Similarly, the Khurasanis were dubbed 'asses' ; the people of Tus 'kine' ; those of Bukhara 'bears' ; and those of Transoxiana 'heretics'.

Bent on revenge, the satirist set out for Baghdad as soon as he heard those verses.

'Whence do you come?' asked Salman.

Ubayd answered : 'I am a poor man from the city of Qazwin.'

'Have you heard some of my verses?' questioned Salman.

‘Yes’, promptly replied Ubayd, I remember these lines :

من خرابا تيم و باده پرست
 در خرابات مغان عاشق و مست *
 ميكشندم چو سبزو دوش بدوش
 ميبرندم چو قدح دست بدست *

A frequenter of the wine-shop and a worshipper of wine am I,
 Love-sick and intoxicated in the tavern of the Magi.
 Like a flagon of wine they carry me about on their backs,
 And pass me about from hand to hand like the circling cup.

Having recited these verses, the stranger warmed up, and, turning to the men of learning who were present, said : ‘Salman is a man of great talents and erudition, but although these verses are ascribed to him, it seems to me that they have been written by his wife !’ The implication was that she had thus described her own mode of life.

This scurrilous innuendo infuriated Salman. Only one man, he thought, was capable of such foul-mouthed invective, namely, Zakani. He impetuously demanded of the stranger a straightforward reply to his question whether he was not Ubayd Zakani. ‘Yes’, said Ubayd, and forthwith he commenced upbraiding Salman.

‘What evidence did you give of your attainments and learning,’ he asked, ‘in lampooning a man whom you had never seen, of whose merits or imperfections you had no

knowledge, and who had never given you any offence ? I have come here solely to chastise you. I wished to have met you in the presence of your sovereign so that you might have been disgraced in his eyes as well as in the eyes of the public. You are lucky, however, that you have been thrown into my claws here on the banks of the Tigris, and are saved from such humiliation, but I trust you will profit by the lesson you have learnt.'

Although smarting under such castigation, Salman could not help admitting his own fault. Rising from his seat, after many an apology, he embraced Zakani and took him to his house as his guest. The two poets thereafter became staunch friends. Ubayd often used to say, ' O Salman, fortune favoured you in that you speedily made peace with me and escaped the venom of my tongue ! '

As in satire and epigram, so in the composition of odes and panegyrics, Salman was perfectly at ease. Hafiz called him ' the emperor of erudite scholars, sovereign of the realm of poetry and eloquence, and the perfection of faith and religion.'

A Casket of Pearls

ONCE Sultan Uwais asked Salman to write some lines in imitation of Zahir-i-Faryabi on the beauty of Dilshad Khatun. The poet wrote a panegyric opening with the following verses :—

در دُرُج دُرُ عقیق لبّت نقد جان نهاد
جنسی نفیس بود بجایِ نهان نهاد *
قفلی ز لعل بر در آن دُرُج زد لبّت
خالت ز عنبر آمد و مهری بر آن نهاد *

In the casket of pearls the cornelian of thy lips has
placed the coin ;
Being an article of immense value, it was kept in
a hidden place.¹
Thy lips form a ruby lock on the lid of that casket
And thy mole an amber seal thereon.

¹ ' Here the mouth of the beloved is compared in one hemistich, in view of her pearl-like teeth, to a casket of pearls, and in the other, on account of its smallness, to a hidden place. Like a small mouth a small waist is accounted the principal charm of a beauty. Hence in a couplet that follows Salman says : Suddenly a subtle thought, finer than a hair, came into the heart of thy girdle and named it " waist " ! '

On the Fringe of the Fountain of Life!

WHO displays finer fancy, Salman or Zahir, in imitation of whose lines the foregoing verses were composed, may be left to the reader to judge. The following epigram is Zahir's:—

رسیده گوشهٔ ابرو بچشم سرمه سای او
تو پنداری بمانداریست در دنبال آهوئی *
یکی خال سید جا کرده بر کنج لب لعش
تو گوئی بر لب آب بقا بنشسته هندوئی *

The fringe of her eyebrow encroaches upon her
collyrium-smeared eye;
Thou mayst think, 'It is an archer in pursuit of an
antelope!'
In a corner of her ruby lips a black mole has
settled down,
Thou mayst say, 'It is a Hindu sitting on the
fringe of the fountain of life'.

As a reward for his verses Salman obtained the grant of two villages. Not satisfied with this, the poet's biographer, Dawlatshah, says that even if the Sultan had bestowed upon Salman the whole province of Rei, he might still have been accused of parsimony! However, the poet did receive as a gift a few more villages from

his royal patron, when he felt old age approaching and asked for permission to retire from the court.

‘Hindu’ in Persian poetry is generally associated with ‘black colour’. The same idea is conveyed by another bard who says :—

‘The Hindu of her ringlets has opened a shop ;
For every hair he demands the price of a life !’

An Infidel in the Garden of Paradise

ANOTHER master of the craft, Katib Isfahani, in imitation of Zahir Faryabi, sees the 'Hindu' admitted to the garden of Paradise !

زاهد اگر تو منکر هستی که ره ندارد
هندو بحوض کوثر در باغ خلد کافر *
بر روی ولعل او بین آن زلف و خال کامد
کافر بباغ جنت هندو بحوض کوثر *

O devotee, if thou believeth it is impossible
That a Hindu can have access to the fountain of Kowsar,
or an infidel to the garden of Paradise,
Look at the ringlet on her visage and at the mole on her
ruby lips,
The infidel has come to the garden of Paradise, and the
Hindu to the fount of Kowsar !

Royalty's Homage to Nizami

ONE of the most celebrated poets keenly sought after by princes was Nizami. From his youth to the last day of his life, however, he scorned the pursuits of this world and, devoting himself to the contemplation of spiritual truths, refused all invitations to the courts of potentates who vied with one another in extending their patronage to him.

Atabeg Qizil Arsalan once deputed a messenger to Nizami, soliciting his presence. The prince of poets sent a reply to the effect that he was a recluse and had ceased to frequent the courts of monarchs. To test the earnestness of his words, the king himself called on Nizami. It is related that having discovered by means of his miraculous powers the Atabeg's intention, the poet conjured up before the prince's eyes a vision of a royal throne and all the pageantry of royalty associated with it, including a host of courtiers and retinue decked out in brocade and jewels, all waiting upon the Shaykh. When Arsalan beheld that spectacle, he was dumbfounded. After an hour the Shaykh removed the illusion and presented himself before the prince as he really was, an aged and decrepit man, sitting on a piece of felt, with the holy book, pen and ink, and a staff placed in front of him. The king was now completely convinced of the Shaykh's sincerity; he kissed the poet's hand with great deference and ever afterwards entertained for him sincere veneration.

Several of Nizami's poems were composed at the solicitation of contemporary princes who rewarded him right royally. For instance, for the romance of 'Khusraw and Shirin', written at the request of and dedicated to

Atabeg Qizil Arsalan, that monarch presented Nizami with fourteen villages in fief. Similarly, Bahram Shah, to whom the poet dedicated his *Makhzanu'l Asrār* (Treasury of Secrets), sent him 5,000 dinars of gold, together with a camel laden with brocades and other precious stuff.

Prediction of Amir Khusraw's Fame

ONE of the favourites alike of the royal court and of the market-place was Amir Khusraw. In name as well as in worth he was a veritable *Khusraw*, or prince, among the poets of his times. It is said that immediately after his birth (A.D. 1263) his father took him to a holy man. 'Thou hast brought to me,' said the Shaykh, 'one who will, in fame, advance two paces beyond the great Khaqani.'

Khusraw, in fact, displayed at a very early age remarkable genius for arts and sciences, mysticism being his favourite study. According to *Haft Iqlim*, or 'Seven Climes', he composed ninety-nine different works, but no list is given. It would appear from a letter of the poet himself that his composition exceeded 400,000 couplets. History records the names of several royal masters in the sunshine of whose court Khusraw spent happy days. It is related that from Sultan Qutbu'd-din, son of Ala'ud-din Khilji, he received, as a prize for a single poem, the weight of an elephant in gold.

One of Khusraw's patrons was Sultan Ghiyasu'd-din Balban, whose son, Sultan Muhammad Khan, Chief of Multan, was put to death by Tartar invaders. Khusraw was taken prisoner and carried to Balkh. On his release, after two years, he returned to Sultan Ghiyasu'd-din and recited in his presence an elegy which he had composed on the murder of Sultan Muhammad Khan. The whole assembly was moved to tears. The Sultan himself wept so bitterly that he was seized with a fever, which proved fatal.

Blending of Hindi with Persian

WITH the advent of Mahmud of Ghazna and his followers and their association with the people in India during the tenth century commenced an era of admixture of Turki and Persian with Hindi, the language current in the provinces of the Punjab, Sindh and Gujarat. During the time of Amir Khusraw, the graceful blending of Persian with Hindi received a fresh impetus. Several pieces of mixed Hindi-Persian composition are assigned to the poet. A separate collection, called *Jawāhir-i-Khusrawī*, was published in India in 1916, under the auspices of the Khusraw Committee. The authenticity of this collection has been challenged. Professor Muhammad Ghani, for instance, calls attention to the fact that a good many expressions noticed in the book received their polish only in and after Shah Jahan's time.¹ Be that as it may, the following specimen of the witticisms of Khusraw, which Ouseley heard at Delhi,² may be cited as an illustration of the verses composed by him, introducing Hindi words which, if read as Persian, would bear an interpretation different from their significance in Hindi :

رفتہ بتماشای کنار جوئی * دیدم بلب آب زن ہندوئی
گفتم صنما بھای زلفت چہ بود * فریاد بر آورد کہ دُر دُر موئی

¹ *History of Persian Language and Literature at the Mughal Court*, Part I, pp. 66-68.

² *Biographical Notices of Persian Poets*, pp. 151-52.

I went to the bank of the rivulet for recreation;
I saw there a Hindu woman.

‘ O idol ! ’ said I, ‘ what may be the price of thy
ringlet ? ’

She exclaimed, ‘ a pearl for every hair ! ’

If read as Hindustani, the last line would run, ‘ She
cried out scornfully, “ Begone, begone, thou cursed
wretch ! ” ’

Cultural Contact of Iran with India

WITH the accession of Babur, the most gifted man of letters that ever ascended the throne of Delhi, the intellectual contact of Iran with India received a great impetus. From that time till the days of Aurangzib brilliant batches of poets were drawn to India by the munificence of the Mughal and the Deccan courts, and the centre of Persian poetry was shifted to India. Badauni mentions about a hundred and seventy, most of whom were of Persian descent, though few of them were born in India. According to Shibli, as many as fifty came during the reign of Akbar alone.

The Mughal period in India was, indeed, one of the most glorious epochs in the history of Persian literature. Gifted poets and scholars from Herat, Bukhara, Samarkand, Iran and Turkistan, who received little appreciation in their native land, continued to flock to the darbars of the monarchs of Hindustan. It may be noted, however, that the migration of Persian poets to India had commenced long before the illustrious founder of the Mughal dynasty defeated Sultan Ibrahim Lodi on the famous field of Panipat.

‘Gather Ye Rosebuds while Ye May!’

BABUR himself could string pearls of poetry, both in Turki and in Farsi. Several specimens of the elegance of his diction, fine fancy, ready wit and humour, are recorded in history. The following verse, written in the vein of Umar Khayyam, is worth noting :—

نوروز و نو بهار و می و دلربا خوشست
بابر به عیش کوش که عالم دوباره نیست *

Sweet are the new year, the spring, the wine and
the sweetheart,
Babur, enjoy them whilst thou canst, for this world
is not to be had a second time !

A Brahman Persian Poet and Professor

TO Sultan Sikandar Lodi belongs the credit of encouraging the study of Persian in India before the advent of Babur. He was a man of the sword as well as of the pen and poured forth a flood of poetry under the pen-name *Gulrukhi* (rose-faced). He was, besides, a liberal patron of learning. We have it, on the authority of Firishta, that during this prince's regime Hindus, who had never before paid any serious attention to Muslim literature, took to studying Persian for the first time. The first fruits of such cultural contact were the Persian verses of the Hindu poet mentioned as 'Barahman.' He was not merely a poet; according to Badauni, he had also acquired proficiency in Persian and 'in spite of his infidelity' he used to give lessons in books of learning of the times.

Here is a glint from the Indian star that lent such lustre to the literary firmament of the long-forgotten past :

دل خون نشدي چشم تو خنجر نشدي گر
ره گم نشدي زلف تو ابر نشدي گر *

The heart would not have turned into blood, had
not thine eye become a dagger ;
The path would not have been lost, had not thy
curly locks been in disorder.

Invitation to Sa'di from the Governor of Multan

A PET child of the Muse, whom one of the Indian princes longed to accord a royal reception, was Shaykh Sa'di. It is related that Sultan Muhammad Khan, Governor of Multan, twice sent very pressing and flattering messages to the poet, entreating him to honour his court with a visit. With the last invitation was sent, as a gift, a copy of the Persian poems of the illustrious poet of India, Amir Khusraw. Although he had been previously honoured by similar invitations from the rulers of the different provinces of his own country, Sa'di was very pleased with this mark of appreciation and esteem from a foreign prince, but he pleaded his advanced age as an excuse for declining the invitation. Being an admirer of Amir Khusraw's poetry, he sent to the Sultan letters eulogising Khusraw's poem, together with a copy of his own verses in his handwriting. It is related, however, that the longing to greet Khusraw at last overcame the dread of crossing the Indus and that the two poets embraced each other at Delhi.

These stories are not authenticated. The fact, however, remains that the friendship of the two masters of poesy inaugurated an era of cultural co-operation and comradeship, the significance of which has been as yet but imperfectly realised by students of the literary history of the two countries.

Sa'di's works are an inexhaustible mine for those who are in search of gems of poetry. No Persian author's words in prose as well as in verse are so fondly recalled to this day as this charming composer's.

We shall have occasion to admire some of the gems as we proceed ; here only a few verses of biographical interest may be noted.

A Graceful Compliment to Atabeg

سکندر بدیوار روئین و سزگت * بکرد از جهان راه یاجوج تنگت
ترا سق یاجوج کفر از زرست * نه روئین چو دیوار اسکندر است

Atabeg averted the Tartar fury and the inhuman massacre and destruction associated with it by offering money and by coming to terms with the invader. In the panegyric from which these verses are taken the poet places his royal master above Alexander because, says he, Alexander checked the advance of Gog with a barrier made of brass and stone, whereas the Atabeg barred the advance of the Gog of paganism with gold. The 'Gog of Paganism' stands for Chingiz Khan.

Better the Travails of a Journey than Comforts at Home !

Sa'di was an indefatigable traveller during his youth. How far the presence of a shrew at home was responsible for his tramps abroad may be surmised from the following verse :—

تبی پای رفتن به از کنش تنگت * بلای سفر به که در خانه جنگت

Walking barefoot is better than wearing narrow shoes that pinch ;

Better the travails of a journey than warfare at home !

Contempt for Court Poets of India

It would appear from the following satirical verses that Sa'di had a poor opinion of the Indian princes' standard of poetic excellence :—

در نوکری هند لباست باید * دستار زر و جامه توست باید
چون گاو شکم ریش درازت باید * نه عقل و خرد فهم و فراست باید

To enter the service of the Indian princes thou
must have a good dress ;
A turban of gold cloth and a garment of silk.
Thou shouldst have the paunch of an ox and a
flowing beard ;
There is no need, however, for intellect, wisdom,
sense, or sagacity !

A Merry Prince

NEXT to Sa'di, the Persian poet who exercised the greatest influence on Indian thought was Hafiz. Born in Shiraz during the first half of the fourteenth century, he was passionately attached to that garden city. The sweet perfume of the gentle breeze blowing over the place and the waters of the stream, Ruknabad, which could 'every human ill assuage and life prolong to Khizr's age,' made him insensible to the delights of travelling.

Shibli Numani has enumerated several princes whose patronage the Nightingale of Shiraz enjoyed. One of these was Abu Is-haq Inju, a friend of poets and a poet himself. He was, however, so negligent of affairs of state and so easy-going and pleasure-seeking that when he was asked to think of dealing with the Muzaf-fari hosts who were investing his capital, he gaily recited the verse :—

بیا تا یک امشب تماشا کنیم * چو فردا شود کار فردا کنیم

Come, let us make merry just for this one night,
When it is to-morrow, we'll think of to-morrow.

On a Mandate to Close All Taverns

WHEN the reins of government of Fars passed into the hands of Mubarizu'd-din Muhamad bin Muzaffar, he issued a mandate for closing all taverns. Hafiz ridiculed the royal decree in these stanzas :—

اگرچه باده فرح بخش و باد گلبلیز ست
ببائنگ چنگ مخور می که محتسب تیز ست *
در آستین مرقع پیاله پنهان کن
که همچو چشم صراحی زمانه خونریز ست *
زرنگ باده بشوئید خرقه ها از اشک
که موسم ورع و روزگار پرهیز ست *

‘ Though wine gives delight and the wind distils
the perfume of the rose,
Drink not wine to the strains of the harp, for the
constable is alert.
Hide the goblet in the sleeve of the patchwork
cloak,
For the time, like the eye of the decanter, pours
forth blood.
Wash your dervish-cloak from the wine-stain with
tears,
For it is the season of piety and the time of absti-
nence.’

بود آیا که در میکرده ها بگشایند
 گره از کار فرو بسته ما بگشایند *
 کیسوی چنگ ببرد بمرگ می ناب
 تا همه مغنچه ها زلف دو تا بگشایند *
 نامه تعزیت دختر از بنویسید
 تا حریفان همه خون از مژه ها بگشایند *
 در میخانه به بستند خدایا مپسند
 که در خانه ترویر وریا بگشایند *
 اگر از بهر دل زاهد خود بین بستند
 دل قوی دار که از بهر خدا بگشایند *

' O will it be that they will re-open the doors of the
 taverns,
 And will loosen the knots from our tangled affairs ?
 Cut the tresses of the harp (in mourning) for the
 death of pure wine,
 So that all the sons of the Magians may loosen
 their curled locks !
 Write the letter of condolence for the (death of
 the) daughter of the Grape,
 So that all the comrades may let loose blood
 (-stained tears) from their eyelashes.
 They have closed the doors of the wine-taverns ;
 O God, suffer not
 That they should open the doors of the house of
 deceit and hypocrisy !
 If they have closed them for the sake of the heart
 of the self-righteous zealot,
 Be of good heart, for they will re-open them for
 God's sake ! ' ¹

¹ Browne's translation, *History of Persian Literature*, Vol. III.

On the Re-opening of Taverns

THE taverns were, in fact, reopened when Shah Shuja succeeded his harsh and ascetic father. Hafiz celebrated the occasion with the following verses :

سحر ز هفت غیلم رسید عژده بگرش
 که دور شاه شجاع است می دلیر بدوش *
 شد آنکه اهل نظر بر کناره میرفتند
 هزار گونه سخن برده ان ولب خاموش *
 بباغ جنگ بگوئیم آن حکایتها
 که از شنیدن آن دیگ سینه میزد جوش *
 رموز مملکت خویش خسروان دانند
 گدای گوشه نشینی تو حافظا مخروش *

At early dawn good tidings reached my ear from
 the Unseen Voice :

‘ It is the era of Shah Shuja ; drink wine boldly ! ’
 That time is gone when men of insight went apart
 With a thousand words in the mouth but with lips
 silent.

To the sound of the harp we will tell those stories
 At the hearing of which the cauldron of our
 bosoms boiled.

Princes (alone) know the secrets of their kingdom ;
 O Hafiz, thou art a beggarly recluse ; hold thy
 peace !

In another poem he sings with rapture :

چنگ در غلغله آمد که کجا شد منکر
جام در قهقهه آمد که کجا شد منام *

The harp began to chuckle and asked 'Where is the objector?'

The cup began to laugh and asked, 'Where is the prohibitionist?'

Later, for various reasons the poet incurred the displeasure of Shah Shuja. The following verse exposed Hafiz to a charge of heresy ; and it was apprehended that the king would take advantage of it :

گر مسلماني همين است که حافظ دارد
وای اگر از پی امروز بود فردائي *

If Muhammadanism were that which Hafiz professes,

Alas, if there should be a to-morrow after to-day !

Getting a timely warning, Hafiz prefixed to the couplet the following verse, thus placing the blasphemous words in the mouth of an infidel :

این حدیثم چه خوش آمد که سحر گه میگفت
بر در میکرده با دف و نی ترسائی *

How delightful to me came this saying which at early morn

A Christian was reciting at the door of the tavern
with tambourine and flute !

A Call from the Deccan

SULTAN AHMAD ILKHANI of Baghdad, himself a poet, musician, painter and artist, made very enticing offers to Hafiz to visit his court, but not all the king's treasure, nor all the court's splendour, could induce the Bulbul of Shiraz to take wing to the city of peace.

‘The zephyr breeze of Musalla and the stream of Ruknabad,’ said the poet, ‘do not permit me to travel or wander afield’.

نمی دهند اجازت مرا به سیر و سفر

نسیم باد مصلی و آب رگنا باد *

A call from the Deccan, however, met with a cheerful response. Sultan Mahmud Shah Bahmani was a poet renowned for proficiency in the sciences and in calligraphy. He was, besides, a munificent patron of learning. A good many poets from Iran and Arabia visited his court and drank from the bubbling fountain of his bounty. Through his favourite Mir Fazlu'llah he invited Hafiz and sent money for the journey to his capital. The stories of the Sultan's hospitality and liberality, particularly of his appreciation of talent, having already reached the ear of Hafiz, he made for the nearest port of Hormuz, where a ship was waiting to sail for India. However, just as he was embarking, there arose a terrible storm which so unnerved the poet that he jumped out of the ship and set off for Shiraz. By way of apology he sent a poem

containing the following verses to Mir Fazlu'llah through a friend on board the vessel.

شکوه تاج سلطانی که بیم جان درو درجست
 کلامی دلکش است اما بدرد سر نمی آرد *
 بس آسان می نمود اول غم دریا ببری سود
 غلط کردم که یک موجش بصد گوهر نمی آرد *

The sense of these verses is beautifully conveyed by the following stanzas in Gertrude Bell's verse-translation of the whole of the ode written by the poet on this occasion :

' The Sultan's crown, with priceless jewels set,
 Encircles fear of death and constant dread.
 It is a head-dress much desired—and yet
 Art sure 'tis worth the danger to the head?

* * *

Full easy seemed the sorrow of the sea
 Lightened by hope of gain—hope flew too fast !
 A hundred pearls were poor indemnity,
 Not worth the blast.'¹

When Mahmud Shah learnt what had happened, with his usual generosity he gave to Mulla Muhammad Qasim of Masshad a thousand *tankah* of gold with instructions to purchase presents for Hafiz and to take them to Shiraz for the poet.

¹ *Poems from the Divan of Hafiz.*

Shiraz Sugar for Parrots of Hindustan

SULTAN GHIYATHU'D-DIN, ruler of Bengal, was also an admirer of Hafiz's poems. It appears that the poet used to send his verses occasionally to this monarch and was in communication with him. One day, the poet received a letter from his Indian patron asking him to build an ode on the following hemistich :---

ساقی حدیث سرو و گل و لاله میرود

‘ O cup-bearer, there is a tale of the cypress and the rose and the tulip.’ ‘Cypress’, ‘Rose’ and ‘Tulip’ were the names of three winsome slave girls in the Sultan's harem. Once, during his illness, the Shah was nursed by those faithful maids and he was grateful to them for their nursing. This excited the jealousy of the other slave girls who twitted them and called them *ghassaleh* (bath-women), because they had washed the king's body while he was ill. The three favourites took the complaint to the king, who, it appears, was then in a poetic mood. He tried to compose a couplet on the subject, but with the composition of the above-quoted hemistich, the fountain of inspiration suddenly ran dry. The monarch, thereupon, called upon his court poets to render it into a couplet. Their attempts, however, did not satisfy him. He then referred the hemistich to Hafiz. To the gifted poet it was child's play, and he despatched forthwith to Bengal an ode beginning with the hemistich.

The following verses have a direct bearing on the reference :—

ساقی حدیث سرو و گل و لاله می‌رود
 وین بحث با ثلاثه غساله می‌رود *
 شکم شکن شوند همه طوطیان هند
 زمین قند پارسی که به بنگاله می‌رود *
 طی زمان به بین و مکان در طریق عشق
 کین طفل یکشنبه ره یکساله می‌رود *
 حافظ ز شوق مجاس سلطان غیاث دین
 خامش مشو که کار تو از ناله می‌رود *

O cup-bearer, there is a tale of the cypress and the
 rose and the tulip,
 And this is the subject of dispute with three washer-
 maids.

All the parrots of Ind would crack sugar,
 From this 'Parsi' sugar-candy that goes to Bengal.
 Behold the swift journey over time and place along
 the path of love,
 That this one-night old infant is on its way to a
 year's journey !¹

O Hafiz, be not heedless of the zest of the court of
 Sultan Ghiyathu'd-din,
 For thy affair is going beyond lamentation.

The whole story, however, appears to be the product
 of the imagination of some poetic brain. ثلاثه غساله is a
 medical term, meaning three cups of wine taken in the

¹ From Shiraz to the Sultan's capital it was approximately a year's journey.

morning to get rid of the feeling of drowsiness brought about by the previous night's indulgence in the company of the 'Daughter of the Vine'. In the verses above quoted Hafiz uses the expression in that sense, but on a different interpretation of the same term, namely, bath-women, has been built up the story of three favourite maids bearing the names, Cypress, Rose and Tulip, which are in the poem no more than flowers.

Auguries from the Poet's Verses

One of the titles by which Hafiz is called is *Lisān-u'l-Ghayb* (The Tongue of the Unseen). He is also mentioned as *Tarjuman-u'l-Asrār* (The Interpreter of Mysteries). There is a general belief in Iran that in case of doubt as to the course of action one should pursue, an omen can be taken from the *Diwan* of Hafiz by opening it at random. Tables, called *Fal-Nama*, are also used for the purpose.

Browne gives some answers recorded in a treatise entitled *Latīfa-i-Ghaybiyya*. One of these is the following verse which set at rest all doubts as to the poet's scepticism and silenced his detractors who raised various objections to the usual prayers being said over his body :

قدم در بخت مدار از جنازه حانظ
که گویچه غرق گناهست می رود به بهشت *

Withhold not thy footsteps from the bier of
Hafiz,
For, though he is immersed in sin, he will go to
Paradise.

Another instance, cited by Browne, is that of Kan'an Beg, one of the celebrities of Gujarat, whose brother, Yusuf Beg, was reported missing in a battle fought near Ahmedabad against a hostile force. The anxiety of the brother was allayed for the time being by the following verse and soon afterwards removed altogether by the safe return of the missing soldier.

یوسف دم گشته باز آید بکنعان غم مخور
 کلبه احزان شود روزی گلستان غم مخور *

The lost Joseph will return to Canaan ; grieve not !

The house of sorrows will one day become a rose garden : grieve not !

An Invitation to Kamalu'd-din Ismail

ANOTHER notable instance of a prince's longing to meet a famous poet was that of Malik Muzaf-faru'd-din, ruler of Fars. His invitation to poet Kamalu'd-din Ismail of Isphan was couched in the following touching terms :

چون نیست مرا بخدمت راه وصال
سر بر خط دیوان تو دارم مه و سال *
گفتم فلکا در تو چه نقصان آید
گر زانکه رسانیم زمانی بکمال *

Since I have not the privilege of waiting on thee,
I keep my head each month and year on the
threshold of thy court.
I said to the sky, 'What harm would there be
to thee,
Wert thou to take me for a time to Perfection ? '

There is a pun on the word دیوان in the second line, so that it means ' I keep my head all the year round on the threshold of thy court ', also ' My mind is engrossed in reading your book of poems all the year round.' There is, again, a pun on the word کمال (perfection) in the second line, which is an abbreviation of the poet's own name.

On receipt of this flattering message, Kamalu'd-din sent a reply in equally complimentary terms :

آني تو که خورشید سر افکنده تست
 هر کوست خداوند هنر بنده تست *
 جویای کمالند بجان اهل هنر
 وانگاه بجان کمال جوینده تست *

Thou art he before whom the Sun bows in all humility :

Every one, howsoever accomplished, is a slave of thine.

Men of talents are with all their heart in quest of 'Perfection,'

While 'Perfection' is whole-heartedly in quest of thee !

In these verses also there is a pun on the poet's name.

While referring to the coarse invective and innuendo which disfigure most of the satirical poems of Iran and Arabia, Browne pays a well-deserved tribute to Kamal Ismail for the following irreproachable specimen of his satirical verses.

گر خواجه ز بهر مابدي گفت * ما چهره ز غم نمی خراشیم
 ما غیر نیکویش نگوئیم * تا هر دو دروغ گفته باشیم

My face shall show no traces of despite,

Although my patron speaketh ill of me :

His praise I'll still continue to recite,

That both of us alike may liars be !

Kamal-i-Khujandi's Mystic Verses

KAMALU'D-DIN'S namesake of Khujand also received royal favours from Timur's son, Miran Shah, governor of Azarbayjan. He, however, cared little for riches. It is related by Jami that after his death when people entered his private room in a rest-house, they found in it nothing except a mat of coarse reeds, on which he slept, and a stone which served him for a pillow. If Kamal deigned to write verses, it was merely, says Jami, 'to conceal the fulness of his saintly nature and spiritual attainments, to prevent the complete suppression of his exoteric by his esoteric life, and to maintain the position of "servitude" to God against an overmastering tendency to be merged in the Deity.'

The following apparently Bacchanalian verses, symbolic of deep spiritual meaning, may be cited as a specimen of his poems :

این چه مجلس چه بهشت این چه مقامست اینجا
غیر باقی لب ساقی لب جامست اینجا *

دولتی کز همه بگریخت ازین در بگذشت
شادی کز همه بگریخت غلامست اینجا *

چون در آئی بطرب خانه ما با غم دل
همه گویند مخدر غم که حرامست اینجا *

ما بپام فلکیم ار بر ما گر بروی
برو آهسته که جام و لب بامست اینجا *

نیست در مجلس ما پیشگاه و صف نعل
شاه و درویش ندانند کدامست اینجا *

صفت عود همه گرم رو و سوخته ایم
 بجز از زاهد افسرده که خامست اینجا *
 چند پرستی چه مقامست کمال این که تراست
 این مقامی که نه منزل نه مقامست اینجا *

What company, what paradise, what resting-place
 are here !

Lasting life, the lip of the cup-bearer, the brim of
 the goblet are here !

That fortune which fled from all (others) did not
 pass by this door ;

That joy which escaped all is here a servant !

When thou enterest our joyous abode with sorrow
 in thy heart

All say, ' Indulge not in sorrow, for it is forbidden
 here ! '

We are on the roof of heaven ; if thou passest by us,
 Go gently, for here is the glass and the edge
 of the roof !

In our audience-chamber there is neither seat of
 honour nor threshold ;

Here king and dervish know not which is which !

Like wood of aloes we are all hot-footed and
 burning,

Save the ice-cold ascetic, who is here (accounted)
 raw.

How often, O Kamal, wilt thou ask, ' What
 station is this which thou possessest ?

Whose station is this ? ' For here is neither
 abode nor lodging ! ¹

¹ As rendered by Browne, *History of Persian Literature*, Vol. III.

A Victim of Green-eyed Jealousy

THE pen-name of Muhammad Shirin, who flourished in the reign of Sultan Shahrukh, son of Timur, was Maghribi. Some say that he assumed this name after his travels in the Maghrib (North-West Africa). Others say that he took the title from the name of Shaykh Muhiyyu'd-din Ibnu'l-Arabi inasmuch as he took lessons in Sufism from another Shaykh who traced his pedigree to that famous master of Sufi lore.

Prince Miran Shah, governor of Tabriz, became a disciple of Maghribi. Once every week he waited upon the poet until Kamal-i-Khujandi appeared on the scene. The prince was captivated by the brilliance of that poet's wit and his charming manners and called twice every week on Kamal, neglecting Maghribi.

Kamal was the greatest spendthrift of the day. Every morning he used to entertain a great number of guests at breakfast. One day, the prince sent him a rich golden girdle, or *kamarband*, set with precious stones. He sold it for a large sum of money and squandered it next morning on a magnificent breakfast. The prince was present at the feast and found that the only friend absent was Maghribi. He asked Kamal the reason.

‘Maghribi is suffering from pain’, said Kamal.

‘What pain?’ asked the prince.

‘Pain of the *waist* (*kamar*)!’ replied the witty bard.

On the Unity of Being

THE principal doctrine of this thorough-going pantheistic poet was the Unity of Being. Throughout all his poems runs this central idea. None can read the following verses from one of the poems without noticing the exquisite flavour of Sufi speculation :

خورشید رخت چو گشت پیدا * ذرات دو کون شد هویدا
 مهر رخ تو چو سایه انداخت * ز آن سایه پدید گشت اشیا
 هر ذره ز نور مهر رویت * خورشید صفت شد آشکارا
 هم ذره بمهر گشته موجود * هم مهر به ذره گشت پیدا
 در بای وجود موج زن شد * موجی بفگند سوی صحرا
 آن موج فرو شد و بر آمد * در کسوت و صورتی دلآرا
 بر رسته بنفشه معانی * چون خط خوش نگار رعنا
 بشگفته شقایق حقایق * بنموده هزار سرو بالا
 این جمله چه بود عین آن موج * و آن موج چه بود عین دریا
 هر جزو که هست عین کل است * پس کل باشد سراسر اجزا
 اجزا چه بود عظم کل * اشیا چه بود ظلال اسما
 اسما چه بود ظهور خورشید * خورشید جمال ذات والا
 صحرا چه بود زمین امکان * کانست کتاب حق تعالی
 ای مغربی این حدیث بگذار
 سر دو جهان مکن هویدا

When the Sun of Thy Face appeared, the atoms
 of the two Worlds became manifest.

When the Sun of Thy Face cast a shadow, from
 that shadow Things became apparent.

Every atom, through the Light of the Sun of Thy
 Countenance, became manifest like the Sun.
 The atom owes its existence to the Sun, while the
 Sun becomes manifest through the atom.
 The Ocean of Being was tossed into waves ; it
 hurled a wave towards the shore.
 That wave sunk and rose in some heart-delighting
 raiment and form.
 Like violets the Ideas sprang up like the pleasant
 down on some fair beauty's face.
 The anemones of the (Eternal) Realities
 blossomed ; a thousand tall cypresses appeared.
 What were all these ? The counterpart of that
 Wave ; and what was that Wave ? Identical (in
 substance) with the Ocean.
 Every particle which exists is identical with
 the whole ; then is the whole altogether the
 parts.
 What are the parts ? The manifestations of the
 All ; what are things ? The shadows of the
 Names.
 What are the Names ? The revelation of the
 Sun, the Sun of the Beauty of the Supreme
 Essence.
 What is the Shore ? The land of Contingent
 Being, which is the Book of God Most High.
 O Maghribi, cease this discourse : do not make
 plain the Mystery of the Two Worlds ! ¹

Here is another specimen :

اي مرکز و مدار وجود و محيط جود
 وي همچو قطب ثابت و چون چرخ بي ثبات *

¹ Browne's translation, *History of Persian Literature*, Vol. III.

گر سوي تو سلام فرستم توئي سلام
 ور بر تو من صلات فرستم توئي صلات *
 کس چون دهد ترا بدو آخر بگو مرا
 اي تو ترا مزدي واي تو ترا زکات *
 يا اشمل المظاهر يا اکمل الظهور
 يا بزرخ البرازخ يا جامع الشقات *
 يا اجمل الجمال ويا املح الملاح
 يا الطف المطایف يا نکته النکات *
 هم درد وهم دوائی وهم حزن وهم فرح
 هم قفل وهم کلیدی وهم حبس وهم نجات *
 هم کنج وهم طلسمي وهم جسم وهم روان
 هم اسم وهم مسمي هم ذات وهم صفت *
 هم مغربي ومغرب وهم مشرقی وشروق
 هم عرش وفرش وعنصر وافلاک وهم جهات *

O Centre and Pivot of Being, and Circumference
of Bounty,

O Fixed as the Pole, and Fickle as the Sphere !

If I send greetings to Thee, Thou art the
greeting,

And if I invoke blessings on Thee, Thou art the
blessing !

How can any one give Thee to Thyself? Tell
me now,

O Thou who art Thine own alms-giver and Thine
own alms !

O Most Comprehensive of Manifestations, and
Most Perfect in Manifestation ;

O Gulf of gulfs, and O Combiner of diversities !

O most Beauteous of the beautiful and O most
 Fair of the fair,
 O most Gracious of the graceful, O most Subtle of
 subtleties!
 Thou art at once both the Bane and the Balm,
 both Sorrow and Joy,
 Both Lock and Key, both Prison and Deliverance!
 Thou art both the Treasure and the Talisman,
 both Body and Soul,
 Both Name and Named, both Essence and
 Attribute!
 Thou art both Western (*Maghribi*) and West, both
 Eastern and East,
 Alike Throne, and Carpet, and Element, and
 Heavens, and Space!¹

¹ As rendered by Browne.

Dainties from the Table of a Gourmet

IF it be permissible for a moment to descend from the stellar spaces of song celestial to the nether regions of a gastronomer poet's cook-room, we may sit us down to a meal prepared for us by poet Bus-haq (Abu Is-haq), who has won renown for himself as a versifier of viands and a panegyrist of pie-crusts and pastries. Whenever the Sun in its setting assumed a yellow colour in the blue vault above, it reminded this poet of a *saffron pilaw* in a cerulean dish !

خور در رواق ازرق چون رونهد بزردي

ياد آيدم هـ زعفران در صحن لا جوردي *

A carder of cotton by profession, Bus-haq basked in the patronage of Timur's grand-son Iskandar ibn Umar Shaykh Mirza, governor of Fars and Isfahan (A.D. 1409-1415). On one occasion the prince asked him why he had been absent for several days from the royal receptions. 'I card cotton for a day,' he said, 'and then spend three days in picking the cotton out of my beard !'

The most notable of his poems is the *Kanzu'l-Ishthiha* (Treasure of Appetite). What made him write that gastronomic poem he thus explains, in the preface, in his own inimitable style :

'At the time when the tree of youth was casting its shadow, and the branch of gladness was heavy with the fruit of hopes, a few verses of an extemporized character

and appropriate to every topic were produced by me. I thought within myself, "The wisest course is this, that I should in such wise guide the steed of poetry through the arena of eloquence, and so spread the banquet of verse on the table of diction, that whoso partake at the board of pleasure should obtain the most abundant helping; and that the masters of eloquence should be filled with admiration therefor, so that this may conduce to my greater fame and popularity". For I heard this verse which says:

سخن هر چه گویم همه گفته اند * بر و بوم او را همه سفته اند

Whatever verse I may utter, others have uttered
it all,
And have penetrated all its domain and territory.

'For some days my thoughts ran in this channel:
"Having regard to the epic narrative of Firdawsi, the salt of whose speech is the flavouring of the saucepan of every food; and the *mathnawis* of Nizami, the sugar of whose verses is the dainty morsel of sweet-tongued parrots; and the *Tayyibat* of Sa'di, which, by general accord, are like luscious honey to the palate of the congenial; and the odes of Khwaja Jamalu'd-din Salman, which take the place of milk and honey in the mouths of philologists; and the products of the genius of Khwaju of Kirman, the caraway-syrup of whose utterances is a cure for the melancholics of the fetters of verse; and the subtle sayings of 'Imad-i-Faqih, whose sweet utterances are as fragrant spices and delicious potions; and the fluent phraseology and well-weighed thoughts of Hafiz, which are a wine fraught with no headache and a beverage delicious to the taste; and

other poets, each of whom was the celebrity of some city and the marvel of some age, what fancies can I concoct whereby the hearts of men can be gladdened?"

'While I was thus meditating, on a favourable morning, when according to my wont and habit, the smoke of an unfeigned appetite rose up from the kitchen of the stomach, there suddenly entered through the door my silver-bosomed sweetheart, my moon-faced darling, whose eyes are like almonds, whose lips are like sugar, whose chin is like an orange, whose breasts are like pomegranates, whose mouth is like a pistachio-nut, smooth-tongued, melodious of utterance, lithe as a fish, sweet-voiced, with a mole like musk ; even as the poet says :

از خنده شیرین نمکدان دهانش * خون میرود از دل چو نمکسوده کبابی

By reason of the sweet smiles of the salt-cellar of
her mouth

Blood flows from the heart, as from a salted *kabab*.

' Said she, "I have lost my appetite altogether, and suffer from a feeling of satiety ; what is the remedy ? " I replied, " Just as in the case of that person who went to a physician, complaining that he had lost his vitality, and the physician thereupon composed for him (the book entitled ' Virility ') *Alfiyya-Shalfiyya*, which when he had perused he at once took to his embraces a virgin girl, so will I compose for thee a treatise on the table, such that when thou hast once read it, thy appetite will return ! " So for her sake I girded up the loins of my soul, and cooked a meal garnished with verbal artifices and rhetorical devices, and baked in the oven of reflection with the dough of deliberation a loaf which rivalled

the orb of the sun in its conquest of the world ; so that
I can proudly exclaim :

خوانی کشیده ام ز سخن قاف تا بقاف
همکاست کجاست که آید برابرم *

I have spread a table of verse from Qāf to Qāf ;
Where is a fellow-trencherman who can rival
me ? ¹

Here are a few specimens of his parodies.

Dough Strings of the Bowl of Wisdom !

Shah Ni'mat, whose disciple and admirer Bus-haq
professed to be, wrote the following verses :

گوهر بحر بیکران مائیم * گاه موجیم و گاه دریائیم
ما بدین آمدیم در دنیا * که خدا را بخلق بنمائیم

We are the pearl of the shoreless Ocean ;
Sometimes we are the Wave and sometimes the
Sea ;

We came into the world for this purpose,
That we might show God to His creatures.

Bus-haq parodied this as under :

رشته لاک معرفت مائیم * که خمیریم و گاه بغرائیم
ما از آن آمدیم در مطبخ * که بما هیچه قلیده بنمائیم

We are the dough-strings of the bowl of Wisdom ;
Sometimes we are the dough and sometimes the
pie-crust ;

We came into the kitchen for this purpose,
That we might show the fried meat to the pastry. ¹

¹ Browne's translation, *History of Persian Literature*, Vol. III.

Khaqani Burlesqued

We have quoted above the verses of Khaqāni in which he says that it dawned on him after thirty years that sovereignty was beggary and beggary sovereignty.¹ Bushaq burlesqued those lines as under :—

پس از سی سال بر اسحاق شد تحقیق این معنی
که بورانیست بادنجان و بادنجانست بورانی *

After thirty years, O Bus-haq, this fact is confirmed

That brinjal is egg-plant and egg-plant brinjal !

In the same spirit of levity he handles the verses of the two great masters, Sa'di and Hafiz.

Roastmeat vs. Lentils

The following lines of Sa'di teach humility to persons in authority :

تواضع ز گردن فرازان نکوست * گدا گر تواضع کند خوبی اوست

Graceful is humility if shown by the great ;

If a beggar shows humility, it is but his nature.

The irrepressible parodist produces this morsel from Sa'di's stuff :

شکم پر ز حلوا و بریان نکوست * عدس گر شکم پر کند خوبی اوست

It is good to have the stomach filled with sweets
and grill ;

If the lentils make the stomach full, it is but their
nature.

¹ Vide page 59 *ante*.

Hafiz's Verses Parodied

Hafiz was the favourite target of the parodist. The gourmand played havoc with several of his ghazals. Here is one illustration.

Hafiz sang :

دوشمه کدیری و سلامت هوسم بود ولی
 فتنه میکند آن نرکس فغان که میپرس *
 کس به امید وفا ترک دل و دین مکناد
 که چنانم من ازین کرده پشیمان که میپرس *

I have a longing for seclusion and safety, but alas !
 Those narcissus-like eyes are so bewitching ; pray
 do not ask me !

Let none surrender his heart and his faith in the
 hope of his sweetheart's fidelity,
 For having committed that folly, I am so penitent ;
 pray do not ask me !

With these verses before him the epicure produced the following dainties :—

روژه داری و قناعت هوسم هست ولی
 چشمکی میزنند آن بیره بریان که میپرس *
 کس ببالای مزعفر مکناد آش ترش
 که چنانم من ازین کرده پشیمان که میپرس *

I have a longing for fasting and moderation, but
 alas !

So bewitchingly doth the roasted meat wink at me ;
 pray do not ask me,

Let none take sauce after *Muza'far* (rice sweetened
and coloured with saffron) ;
For having committed that folly, I am so penitent ;
pray do not ask me ! ¹

All Invited to His Table

That such literary pleasantries were enjoyed even by
poets is shown by the following epigram from the pen
of Katibi :

شیخ بسحاق دام نعمته * نرم پخت او خیال اطعمه را
سفره او فکند از نعمت * هست برخوان او صلاح همه را

Shaykh Bus-haq, may his luxury endure,
Dished up hot the fancy of viands ;
A table full of luxuries he spread ;
All are invited to his table.

¹ Several other illustrations are given in *Wit, Humour and Fancy of the Persians* by M. N. Kuka.

Jami's Connection with India

ONE of the illustrious contemporaries of Babur was Maulana Abdu'r-Rahman Jami. He was one of the most accomplished of Persian poets who lived in the reign of Sultan Husain Bayqara, a descendant of Timur. The prince held his court at Herat, not far from the small town of Jam, where the poet was born. Esteemed by the public generally as a learned divine and as a gifted poet and scholar, he was likewise the idol of all the living princes and nobles of his age.

Babur describes Jami in his Memoirs as 'the all-surpassing head of the poet-land,' 'unrivalled in his day for esoteric and exoteric knowledge.' His Sufistic poetry captivated the hearts of the people in Hindustan as well as in Iran. Although he did not honour India with a visit, he was in touch with the courts of her princes. One of his odes was addressed to a merchant-prince in the Deccan, Shaikh Mahmud Gawan, who was called *Maliku't-Tujjar*, or the Prince of Merchants, and who was himself a poet and became Prime Minister :

جامي اشعار دلاویز تو جنسی است نفیس
 بود آن حسن ادا لطف معانی تارش *
 مهره قافله هند روان کن که رسد
 شرف مهر قبول از ملک القجارش *

Jami, thy fascinating verse is a rare production,
 Its warp is from beauty of expression, and its weft
 from nicety of meaning ;
 Send it along with the caravan of Hind, so that it
 may be accorded
 The honour of acceptance by the Prince of Merchants.

How highly Jami's poems were esteemed in India is shown by the time, talent and treasure spent on the preparation of a manuscript of one of his works, *Bahāristān*, for the library of Shah Jahan. Written in the finest Nasta'liq character by the famous scribe, Muhammad Husain, known in recognition of his inimitable penmanship by the title of *Zarrin Kalam*, or 'Pen of Gold,' it was embellished by no less than sixteen eminent painters of the day. Nine of these were employed on the work of illuminations and marginal arabesques ; five on coloured paintings, three on hunting scenes ; and three on painting the faces in the vignettes and margin. Shah Jahan's autograph on the flyleaf shows that the manuscript was placed in the Emperor's library in the year 1611.

A Grievance against the Baghdadis

THE Sultan of Egypt sent Jami pressing invitations to his court, but to no purpose. Of all the poets he was the least inclined to fawn on greatness. Although he was held in profound respect throughout the East, on one occasion, on the evidence of a garbled edition of one of his poems, he was accused of hostility to the House of 'Ali. Jami easily repelled the charge at a meeting presided over by the learned divines of Baghdad, but this incident engendered feelings of bitterness against the Baghdadis, as may be seen from the following opening lines of one of his poems :

بگشاي ساقيا باب شط سر سبوي
وز خاطر م کدورت بغداديان بشوي *
مهرم به لب نه از قدح مي که هيچ کس
را بندي اين ديار نيزد بگفت و گوي *
ار نا کسان وفا و مروت طبع مدار
از طبع ديو خاميت آدمي سبوي *

O cup-bearer, unseal the wine jar by the brink of the Shatt,

And wash from my memory the unpleasantness of the Baghdadis.

Seal my lips with the wine cup, for not one Of the people of this region deserves a thought.

Hope not for fidelity or generosity from the unworthy,

Hope not for manly virtues from those of fiendish disposition.

The Tables Turned

ONCE Jami recited the following verses in an assembly :—

بس که در جان فگار و چشم بیدارم توئی
هر که پیدا می شود از دور پندارم توئی *

So constantly is thy image before my afflicted heart
and wakeful eyes,

That whosoever appears from afar, I think it is thou.

One of the wags present thought he could indulge
in a joke at the expense of the poet, and asked :—

در خوي پیدا شود

If an ass were to appear?

Jami instantly replied, as if in continuation of his
verses, and pointing at the same time to the wag with
his finger :

من باز پندارم توئی

I should still think it is thou!

A Crow's Egg Will Become a Crow

JAMI'S nephew, Maulana Abdu'llah, whose *pseudonym* was Hatifi, was also a bard who drew to his humble cell the rulers of the times. There is a story current that before allowing his nephew to write poetry Jami asked him, with a view to testing his talent, to compose a 'parallel' to the following verses in Firdawsi's satire on Sultan Mahmud :

درختي که تلخست وي را سرشت
 کرش در نشاني بباغ بهشت *
 وراز جوي خلدش بهنگام آب
 به بينخ انگبين ريزي و شهيد ناب *
 سر انجام گوهر بکار آورد
 همان ميوه تلخ بار آورد *

A tree whereof the nature is bitter,
 Even wert thou to plant it in the Garden of
 Paradise,
 And if, at the time of watering, from the River of
 Paradise
 Thou pourest on its roots nectar and fine honey,
 In the end it will manifest its nature
 And produce the same bitter fruit.

Hatifi passed the test with the following verses to match Firdawsi's :

اگر بیضه زاغ ظلمت سرشت
 نهی زیر طاوس باغ بهشت *

بهنگام آن بیضه پرورده نش
 ز انجیر جنت دهی ارزش *
 دهی آبش از چشمه سلسبیل
 بدان بیضه گر دم دم جبرئیل *
 شود عاقبت بچه زاغ زاغ
 برد رنج بیهوده طاوس باغ *

If thou should'st place a crow's egg of the nature
 of darkness
 Under the Peacock of the Garden of Eden,
 And if at the time of nourishing the egg,
 Thou should'st give it grain from the fig-tree of
 Paradise,
 And should'st water it from the fountain of Salsabil,
 And should Gabriel breathe his breath into that
 egg,
 In the end the crow's egg will become a crow ;
 Vain will be the travail of the Peacock of Paradise !

A Poet's Defiance of a Royal Decree

‘**A** PEARL of the Sea of Truth and a traveller on the plains of Sufism’, as Dawlatshah styles him in his Memoirs of the Poets, poet Qasimu'l-Anwar received royal honours during his life-time. Wherever he went, he captivated the hearts of the people. In Herat all the learned men of the day and most of the members of the royal family became his disciples. Crowds of people attended the assemblies he held and paid him homage higher even than that offered to the rulers of the land. Such popularity must pay its penalty. Envious persons misrepresented to King Shahrukh the growing influence wielded by the Sayyid and expressed their misgiving that unless Qasim was asked to leave Khurasan, the young men of the city, who implicitly followed his behests, would rebel against the State. The king accordingly commanded the Sayyid to leave Khurasan. He, however, refused to obey the order and maintained vehemently that a Muslim ruler had no right to tyrannize over one of the faithful who had committed no crime whatsoever. So great was the awe inspired by the mystic poet that the officers of the court dared not resort to coercion. At last, the learned and magnanimous Prince Baysangar said he would prevail upon the Shaykh by mildness and persuasion to bow to the wishes of the king.

A Prince's Persuasion

The prince accordingly waited upon the poet.

After some conversation, the holy man said to the prince : ‘Your father, a Muslim king, orders me to

leave his capital. May I know the reason for such a requisition?'

'Oh revered master!' said Baysangar in a soothing tone, 'why go into arguments? Why not act agreeably to your own words?'

'What words?' asked the Sayyid.

The prince thereupon recited the following couplet from one of the odes of the poet-saint :

قاسم سخن کوتاہ کن ہر خیز و عزم راہ کن
شکر بر طوطی فگن مردار پیدش کردسان *

O Qasim, cut short the argument, rise and take the road!

Throw sugar to the parrot, carrion to the vultures!

The poet admired the ready wit and discretion of the prince and departed for Balkh and Samarqand where he remained for a good long time, beloved and honoured by high and low.

The Sign of a True Lover

After some years Qasim returned to Herat; thence he went to the town of Jam and rested in a garden in a neighbouring village, placed at his disposal by the chief of the village. As the climate of the place agreed very well with the Sayyid, his disciples and friends purchased the garden. In it they built for him a residence where his complexion assumed a rosy tint and he began to put on flesh. Seeing this, one of his friends asked him what ought to be the sign of a true lover of God.

'A yellow countenance and an emaciated body,' was the reply.

'Then why art thou the very antithesis of these?' asked the man.

‘ O my brother ’, replied the sage, ‘ I was once the lover, but now I am the beloved ! ’

The Hand of Destiny

One of Qasim’s couplets, the only specimen of his mystic poetry given in the *Ātash Kāda*, may be noted :

قضا دستي است پنج انگشت دارد
 چو خواهد از کسی کلامی بر آرد *
 دو بر چشمش نهد دیگر دو بر گوش
 یکی بر لب نهد گوید که خاموش *

Destiny is (like) a hand possessing five fingers ;
 When it wishes to have its decree obeyed by any
 one,
 It places two of the fingers on the eyes, two on the
 ears,
 And one upon the lips, saying ‘ Be silent ! ’

Fighani's Fear and Umar's Prayer

ONE of the poets neglected in Iran but appreciated in India was Fighani. He found a liberal patron at Tabriz in Sultan Yaqub, the Prince of the 'White Sheep Turkomans.' This poet's greatest fear was lest he should, while lying in his coffin, tempt the angels to have a sniff at his wine-besmeared shroud !

آلوده شراب فغانی بخاک رفت * آه ارملائکش کفن تازه بو کنند

' Stained with wine Fighani sank into the earth ;
Alas, if the angels should sniff at his fresh
shroud ! '

It would seem, however, that the source of such anxiety had altogether disappeared before he went to his last resting place. Before the angel of death knocked at his door, he had retired from the world and, bidding good-bye to the cup-bearer, had spent his days in the holy city of Masshad.

We may contrast with Fighani's fear the prayer of Umar Khayyam to be buried in a winding sheet of vine-leaf :

گر در گذرم بپاوه شوئید مرا * تلقین ز شراب ناب گوئید مرا
خواهید بروز حشر یا بید مرا * از خاک درمیکده چوئید مرا
چندان بخورم شراب کین بوی شراب

آید ز تراب چون شوم زیر تراب *

تا بر سر خاک من رسد مخمور

از بوی شراب من شود مست و خراب *

‘ Ah with the Grape my fading life provide,
And wash my Body whence the life has died.
And in a Winding sheet of Vine Leaf wrapt
So bury me by some sweet Garden side

‘ That even my buried ashes such a snare
Of perfume shall fling up into the air,
As not a True Believer passing by
But shall be overtaken unaware.’¹

¹ As rendered by Fitzgerald.

Katibi's Defence of Prodigality

IN recognition of his superior penmanship Maulana Muhammad Shamsu'd-din obtained the title of *Katibi*, or 'the Scribe', which he adopted as his poetical title. When he was in Herat, Sultan Baysangar gave him one of Kamal Ismail's panegyrics and asked him to compose a reply to it. Katibi did it so skilfully that it evoked the applause of all the bards and wits of the court. It failed, however, to please the fastidious prince. The poet, therefore, departed from Herat, and travelled by Astrabad and Gilan to Shirwan, where he received a cordial welcome from its monarch, Amir Shaikh Ibrahim, descendant of the great Timur, who took him into his service.

For the very first poem, which he composed in praise of the prince, Katibi received a present of ten thousand dirhams. Within a short time, however, he distributed the amount among poor poets, religious mendicants, and people in distress. When chided by his friends for his imprudence, Katibi defended himself on the ground that the bounty of the prince was thus made a source of relief to hundreds. It, however, reduced him to a state of penury. The following verses wittily describe how desperate his condition was:

مطبخی را دی طلب کردم که بغرائی پزد
تا شود ز آن آش کار ما و مہمان ساخته *

گفت لحم و دنبہ کُریابم کہ خواهد داد آرد
گفتم آنکو آسیای چرخ گردان ساخته *

Yesterday I asked my chéf to bake for me a pie
That mine own and my guests' needs be satisfied.
'If', quoth he, 'I get the meat and the fat, who'll
give me the flour?'
'He', I replied, 'who makes the millstone of the
heavens revolve.'

The Rose and the Nightingale

THE poem, which the poet presented to Ibrahim Shirwan Shah, was in the rhyme of Gul, a rose, and the king was particularly pleased with the following couplet :—

دوش بلبل این غزل می خواند بر سرو بلند
غرق شب‌نم شد بگلشن ز آب این گُفتار گل *

‘ Last night the Nightingale, perched on a tall cypress, chanted this song ;
On hearing his plaintive note, the Rose was drowned, in the garden, in the dews of heaven (tears) ’

‘ From what garden has this melodious nightingale flown hither ? ’ asked the king in a poetic vein.

The poet answered :—

همچو عطار از گلستان نیشاپورم ولی
خار صحرای نیشاپورم من و عطار گل *

‘ Like Attar I come from the rose-garden of Nishapur ;
But the thorn of the desert of Nishapur am I, and Attar the rose. ’

After some time, Katibi visited Azarbaijan and composed a poem in praise of the Turkoman ruler of that province, Sikander Qāra Yūsuf. As it was not received so graciously as he had expected, in his

anguish the poet wrote a lampoon upon the prince and proceeded to Isfahan. Here he received the appreciation due to him from the eminent poets of the day, but he soon got sick of worldly riches and glory. Renouncing attendance at the courts of earthly potentates, he took the Sufi Path and attached himself to the throne of the King of Kings.

A Thief Has Fallen on a Thief !

IT seems plagiarism was rampant in the days of Katibi. Incessantly he denounces rhymesters who borrow images from the poems of old masters. Even the masters do not escape castigation for such weakness :

در حسن معنی ز خسرو برد نتوان کرد منع
ز آنکه استادست خسرو بلکه ز استادان زیاد *
ور معانی حسن را برد از دیوان کمال
هیچ نتوان گفت او را دزد بر دزد افتاد *

If Hasan stole ideas from Khusraw, none can prevent him,
For Khusraw is a master, nay, more than master,
And if Kamal pilfered Hasan's ideas from his Diwan,
One can say nothing to him ; a thief has fallen on a thief !

Incision of the Tongue increases Eloquence !

The following epigram may form a fitting epilogue to this brief biographical notice of this poet :—

فریاد ز دست خامه قیر اندود
کو راز دلم بدشمن و دوست نمود *

گفتم که زبانش ببرم گنگ شود
 ببریدم از آن فصیح تر گشت که بود *

Alack at the hands of my pitch-stained pen,
 Which showed forth my secret to foe and friend!
 I said, ' I will cut its tongue that it may become
 dumb' :
 I did so, and it waxed more eloquent than before.¹

Humayun as a Poet

TO the distinguished assemblage of poets and literary men drawn to the Mughal court during Babur's time was added a fresh band of scholars and poets drawn from the neighbouring countries during Humayun's reign. He had an aversion for Turki and a strong predilection for Persian. Trained by his learned father's learned secretaries, Khwaja Kalan and Shaikh Zainu'd-din, he developed during his youth a taste for mathematics, history, geography and astronomy, and spent his days in the company of Shaikh Abu'l-Qasim Astrabadi, Mulla Nuru'd-din and Maulana Ilyas. Poetry, however, was his favourite pastime, and several specimens of his *ghazals*, *mathnavīs*, and *ruba'is* are quoted in Firishta's *History* and Abu'l-Fazal's *Akbarnāmā*. These verses are, indeed, remarkable for their terseness, clearness of expression and simplicity.

A Wordy War on the Ethics of War

Once in an appeal to Kamran for peace, Humayun warned Kamran that on the day of judgment he would be answerable before God for the blood of the people :—

بود خون آن قوم در گردننت * بود دست آن جمع در دامننت
همان به که بر صلح رای آوری * طریق سروت بجای آوری

The blood of the community will hang on thy neck ;

The hand of that population will seize thy skirt ;
Better it is that thou shouldst think of peace
And show the way of kindness and generosity.

In marked contrast to such humane sentiments was couched Kamran's blunt reply :

عروس ملک کسی در کنار کبیر تنگت * که بود بر لب شمشیر آبدار دهد

He alone holds fast the bride of the Kingdom to
his bosom

Who kisses the lip of the pointed sword.

The Moth and the Candle

Humayun often displayed great poetic insight in correcting some of the versifiers of the court. For instance, during his flight to Iran, Mulla Hairati, a poet hailing from the Trans-Caspian Province, presented him with a *ghazal*, which opened with the following lines :

که دل از عشق بزان که جگرم میسوزد

عشق هر لحظه بداغ دگرم میسوزد *

همچو پروانه به شمع میسوزد کار است مرا

که اگر پیش روم بال و پر میسوزد *

Sometimes my heart, sometimes my liver, burns
with the love of the beauties ;

Every second love consumes me with a fresh scar.

Like the moth with the candle I have my affair

That if I proceed further, it would burn my wing
and feather.

Humayun improved upon the last hemistich as under :

میروم پیش اگر بال و پر میسوزد

Further I go, even though my wing and feather
be consumed.

Henna Develops Colour in India !

IT is not possible to refer even briefly to all the poets of Iran who adorned the Mughal court since those days. Invited or uninvited, a large number of them went there and found ample recognition of their talents. There was such lack of appreciation of poets in Iran in those days of decadence that Ali Quli Salim did not merely indulge in poetic fancy when he said :

نیست در ایران زمین سامان تحصیل کمال
تا نیامد سوی هندوستان حنا رنگین نشد *

There is not in Iran the means of acquiring
perfection ;
Henna does not develop its colour until it comes
to Hindustan.

A Nightingale of Kabul settles in Delhi

Even those who at first scoffed at the idea of leaving their home in search of fame or fortune in a foreign land had to climb down from the ethereal heights of self-sufficiency. For instance, Maulana Qasim Kahi, an associate of Jami at Herat, had a strong prejudice and contempt for India. In one of his odes he boasted :

بہی تو بلبل چمن آرای کابل
زاغ وزغن نہ کہ بہ ہندوستان شوی *

Kahi ! thou art the nightingale that adorns the
garden of Kabul,

Thou art not a crow, nor a kite, that thou shouldst
go to Hindustan !

Later, however, enchanted by the spell of Akbar's
court, the conceited Kabuli betook himself to Delhi,
where he attained great distinction.

Akbar's Library

AKBAR also had developed a taste for poetry and his encouragement of learning is specially memorable for the impetus he gave to the cultivation of the Hindi language and literature and the translation of several Sanskrit works into Persian. Being very fond of music and fine arts, history and literature, he made it a point to have books on all subjects read to him regularly by experts. In his *Ā'in-i-Akbarī* Abu'l-Fazl gives an idea of the books thus read out to him.

‘The possessor of the world,’ says he, ‘in consonance with his wide knowledge has divided his library into several sections. A portion of it is kept inside the Harem, and some outside it. Each section is sub-divided into several heads according to the value of the books and the estimation in which the sciences of which they treat are held. Prose books and poetical works, Hindi, Persian, Greek, Kashmirian, Arabic, are all separately arranged. In this order they are also brought to his Majesty’s view. Every day experienced and enlightened people bring and read them before his Majesty, who listens to each book from the beginning to the end. At the page at which the reader stops his Majesty makes a mark with his own pen, corresponding to the number of the page, and in proportion to the number of leaves read out the reader is rewarded with cash either in gold or in silver. Among books of renown there are few which are not read in the auspicious assembly; and there are no historical facts of past ages or curiosities of science or interesting speculations with which his Majesty, a leader of the wise and an impartial judge, is not acquainted. He does not feel

vexed at hearing books read over again, and listens to them with increased delight. They always read in his royal presence from among *Akhlāq-i-Nāsirī*, *Kimyā-i-Saādat*, *Qabus Nāmā*, *Maktubāt-i-Sharaf*, *Munāwī*, *Gulistan*, *Hudiqā*, *Mathnawī-yi-Ma'nawī*, *Jām-i-Jam*, *Būstān*, *Shāh Nāmā*, *Khamasa-i-Shaikh*, *Kulliyāt-i-Khusraw* and *Jāmī*, *Diwān-i-Khāqānī*, and *Anwarī*, and several works on history.'

The Chain of Friendship

Abu'l-Fazl also quotes with appreciation the following verse as a specimen of Akbar's best composition :

نیست زنجیر جنون در کردن مجنون زار
عشق دست دوستی در گردنش افکنده است *

It is not the chain of madness that has encircled
the neck of distracted Majnun,
It is the hand of friendship that love has cast
round his neck.¹

No Cap of Royalty for a Bald Head

When the news of the encounter of the Governor of Kashmir with the pretender Yadgar Mirza reached Akbar's ears, he recited offhand the following couplet :

کلاه خسروی و تاج شاهی * بهر کل کی رسد حاشا و نلا

The cap of royalty and the crown of kingship,
How can they fit a bald head? Never! Never! ¹

¹ Quoted by Prof. Ghani in his *History of Persian Language and Literature at the Mughal Court*, Vol. III.

A Wordy Warfare

WHEN Akbar ascended the throne, Amir Quli Khan, known as Khan-i-Zaman, one of the grantees of Humayun's court, was appointed a *jagirdar* of Jaunpur. Soon afterwards the Khan raised the standard of independence. Claiming equality with Akbar, he sent the following metrical greeting to the Emperor :

ای سد سکندر زمانه در تو
 یاجوج بود سپاهی لشکر تو *
 در دور تو آثار قیامت پیدا است
 دجال توئی خواجه امینا خر تو *

O thou, the wall of the Alexander of the time is
 thy door,
 The soldier of thy army is a Gog ;
 In thy regime the symptoms of the day of Resur-
 rection are apparent,
 Thou art *Dajjal* (a fiend), and Khwaja Amina is
 thy ass.

Akbar replied in the same rhyme and metre :—

ای خان زمان که پر بود لشکر تو
 شد دولت من باعث کز و فر تو *
 کمتر باشم ز خر دجال امروز
 فردا من اگر جدا نسازم سر تو *

O Khan-i-Zaman, whose army is full to over-
 flowing,
 My sovereignty was the source of thy pomp and
 glory ;

Less than the ass of *Dajjal* should I be to-day,
If to-morrow I do not sever thy head from thy
body.

Dajjal is the fabulous impostor who, it is believed, would appear at the approach of the day of Resurrection to misguide people, and to oppose the Redeemer, who will descend from Heaven to deliver the world from sin.

Khan-i-Zaman returned the compliment with the words :

تا هست اثر خالصه در کشور تو
مشکل ده بمن جنگ کند لشکر تو *
بگذر ز زر و سیم که تا نوکر تو
از سر گذرد برای سیم و زر تو *

So long as there is any trace of the *Khalsa* army
in thy kingdom,
It is unthinkable that thy troops should fight
against me ;
Tempt with more lavish gifts of money thy
mercenary,
So that he may give up his head for thy gold and
silver.

Akbar's rejoinder ran as follows :

با آنکه بود خاک درم افسر تو
امروز بمن فرو نیاید سر تو *
از دولت من هست ترا سیم وزر
و ز زور زر است قدرت لشکر تو *

Although the dust of my door is thy crown,
 To-day thy head does not stoop to me ;
 From my bounty thou hast gold and silver ;
 And from that gold (bounty) doth thy army gain
 in strength.

Khan-i-Zaman yielded at last and offered the olive branch :

اي شاه زمان منم کمين نوکر تو
 و ز ترس نمي توانم آمد بر تو *
 از دور تو قصد کشتن من داري
 نزديک چسان توانم آمد بر تو *

O King of the world I am thy humble slave,
 It is merely through fear that I am unable to come
 near thee ;
 Even from a distance thou hast the intention of
 killing me,
 How, then, can I come near thee ?

Akbar's response was also couched in friendly terms :

گفتي تو چو راستي خدا ياور تو
 صد رحمت حق بر پدر و مادر تو *
 تغير مده تو سکه و خطبه من
 تا من نکم آرزوي کشور تو *

Since thou hast uttered the truth, God be thy
 Helper,
 A hundred blessings of the Lord be poured on thy
 father and mother !
 Replace not my coin and ' *Khutba* ' by yours,
 So that I may not wish to acquire thy territory.¹

¹ Quoted by Prof. Ghani in his *History of Persian Language and Literature at the Mughal Court*, Vol. III.

On the Death of His Child

UNPARALLELED lustre was received by the court of Akbar from the 'pearl-scattering pen' of a large number of illustrious poets, historians, philosophers, theologians, physicians, painters, musicians and artists of divers talents. Of these the *Shirin kalām* (sweet-tongued) Faizi was the most distinguished. Badauni says that in the spheres of poetry, enigma, prosody, history, and orthography, Faizi had no equal.

The following lines on the death of his child may be quoted as a specimen of his poems :

اي روشني ديدۀ روشن چگونۀ
من بي تو تيره روز تو بي من چگونۀ *
ما تم سراست خانۀ من در فراق تو
تو زير خاك ساخته مسكن چگونۀ *
بر خار و خس كه بستر و بالين خراب تست
اي ياسمين عذار سمن تن چگونۀ *

O brightness of my eyes, how art thou ?

Without thee my days are dark. Without me how art thou ?

My house is a house of mourning in thine absence ;
Thou hast made thine abode beneath the dust ; how art thou ?

Thy bedding is spread on thorns and brambles ;
O thou, whose cheeks and body were as jasmin,
how art thou ?

Boast of Abbas and Pride of Akbar

ONCE an ambassador from Shah Abbas the Great, arrived at Agra with personal letters of friendship and precious presents for Akbar from the great Shah. One of the letters contained the following quatrain from the pen of the famous poet of the court of Iran, Mulla Wahid :

زنگي بسپاه و خيل و لشکر نازد
رومي بسنان و تیغ و خنجر نازد *
اکبر بخزینہ پر از زر نازد
عباس به ذوالفقار حیدر نازد *

Zangi glories in his infantry and cavalry,
Rumi boasts of his spear, sword, and dagger ;
Akbar is proud of his treasure full of gold,
The pride of Abbas is the sword of Ali.

Touched to the quick, Akbar glanced at Faizi. The born poet was ready with the following dazzling rejoinder :

فردوس به سلسبیل و کوثر نازد
دریا به گهر فلک به اختر نازد *
عباس به ذوالفقار حیدر نازد
کونین به ذات پاک اکبر نازد *

Paradise prides itself on its streams, *Salsabil* and *Kawthar*,

The sea boasts of its pearls, the sky of its stars ;
Abbas gives himself airs with the sword of Ali,
The object of pride to both the worlds is the pure
soul of Akbar.

Liberality of Khan-i-Khanan

ONE of the most liberal patrons of learning and poetry, himself a master of the art of stringing pearls of poetry not only in Farsi but also in Arabi, Turki, Sanskrit, and Hindi, was Abdu'r Rahim Khan-i-Khanan, the famous commander of Akbar's army against Sultan Muzaffar of Gujarat. The Persian poet Rasmi Qalandar has recalled, in beautiful verses, the names of several of his colleagues who came to India and basked under the Khan's patronage. The most notable among them were Urfi, Faizi, Naziri, Shakibi, Hayati, Naw'î and Kufwi.

Once Naziri of Nishapur, who had also migrated to Hindustan and had enjoyed the patronage of the Khan, asked, from sheer curiosity, what the bulk of a lac of rupees in gold might be. Immediately the Khan sent him a gold bar equivalent in value to a hundred thousand rupees. When Naziri wanted to return it, his generous patron declined to take it back.

Shah Abbas Humiliated

Another Persian poet, Kauthari, sang the praises of Khan-i-Khanan in terms directly reflecting on the patronage of Shah Abbas. In the following verses the poet indignantly tells the Shah that the only thing left to him is to send his poems to India :

که باشد جنس معنی را خریدار	*	که در ایران کسی ناید پدیدار
بدید شد سوی هندوستانم	*	در ایران تلخ گشته کام جانم
متاع خود بهندوستان فرستم	*	چو قطره جانب غمان فرستم
خریدار سخن جز خانخازان	*	که نبود در سخن دانان دوران

There is none within sight in Iran,
Who would purchase these verses of deep meaning ;
Soul-sick am I in the land of Iran,
Needs must I turn to Hindustan.
Like a drop going towards the ocean
I may send my treasure to the land of the Hindus ;
For there is not among the learned of the age
A patron of speech except the Khan-i-Khanan.

High Praise of Urfi by Faizi

ONE of the luminaries of the Mughal court, comparable to Naziri, was Maulana Jamalud-din Muhammad known by his pen-name Urfi. 'In height and overbounding power,' said Faizi, 'and in invention of meaning and melody of words and rapidity of thought and minuteness of observation I have not seen nor heard any one like him.' Peerless in popular estimation was his *mathnawi*, *Nal Daman*, embodying the immortal Indian story of Nal Damayanti.

After distinguishing himself in poetical contests with Muhtasham Kashi, Wahshi Yazdi, Arif Lahiji, Husain Kashi and other versifiers in Shiraz, Urfi arrived in India. Immediately on arrival he proceeded to Delhi to call on Faizi, who received him most kindly and supplied all the requirements of the distinguished visitor. But Urfi was a man of temper so that there was soon a rift within the lute.

Faizi's Puppies

To the orthodox Muslims of the day like Urfi a dog was an abomination. On the other hand, Faizi was very fond of dogs. Once, seeing several puppies with gold collars round their necks, Urfi asked Faizi, who was caressing one of them, in derision, 'What may be the name of the offspring of my lord?'

مخدوم زاده به چه اسم موسوم اند

Faizi promptly replied :

عربی

This word had, however, a double meaning: (1) 'the common or usual name' and (2) 'the name (of the questioner himself) Urfi.'

Hot-headed Urfi could not be thus silenced. He was ready with the retort:

مبارک باشد

These words were also capable of two interpretations: (1) 'May it be *mubarak* or auspicious!' and (2) 'It should be *Mubarak* (the name of Faizi's father)!'

This exchange of cutting sarcasm led to a rupture between the two talented men. Urfi, thereafter, sought the patronage of Hakim Abu'l Fath and after the death of that patron he attached himself to the court of Khan-i-Khanan.

No Playfulness Without Permission !

One day Urfi was strolling with Faizi in a garden where they saw a beautiful damsel. Seeing the sweet breeze playing with her lustrous locks, Faizi exclaimed:

ای صبا آن زلف را بر چهره زیدش نه

O breeze, lay those ringlets on her pretty face.

With amazing promptitude Urfi completed the couplet with the following distich:

آنچه بی رخصت ز جا برداشتی بر جاش نه

What thou didst lift up without permission put back in its place.

Maulana Naw'i

AMONG the poets of the court of Khan-i-Khanan a conspicuous figure was Maulana Muhammad Riza, whose poetic name was Naw'i. Until the invasion of Merv by Abdu'llah Khan he enjoyed the affectionate friendship of Mir Muhammad Khan, the governor of the place. After the invasion he went to Khurasan and thence to Hindustan.

With his usual generosity the Khan-i-Khanan showed the greatest kindness to the Persian poet and presented him to the Emperor's son, Prince Daniyal, who was delighted with his society and agreeable manners. Naw'i dedicated to this prince a touching poem relating the true and tragic story of a Hindu princess who burnt herself on the funeral pile with her deceased husband. The following couplet, describing the reluctance of the devouring fire to injure the heroine of the poem, made a great impression on the poet's royal patron :

چنان مستانه در آتش گذر کرد * که از بد مستیش آتش حذر کرد

To the blazing flames she rushed with such mad fury
That dazed by her intoxication even the fire shrank
from injuring her.

Naw'i composed several poems in praise of the Khan, for which he received many presents. For the *Sāqi-Nāma* (Ode to the Cup-Bearer) alone, he was given ten thousand rupees, an elephant, and a horse in superb harness. The author of the *Zakhiratu'l Khawānin* declares that Naw'i received at various periods from the Khan-i-Khanan gifts equivalent in the aggregate to his weight in gold.

An Anacreon of the Mughal Court

ANOTHER protégè of Khan-i-Khanan was Naziri, the chief lyric poet of the time of Akbar. After having spent some years in literary pursuits in his native town, Nishapur, he went to Kashan and began to write verses in the style of Hafiz. Thence he went to Agra with a view to attaching himself to the court of the Khan by whom he was well received. When Jahangir ascended the Mughal throne, Naziri wrote an exquisite *qasida* and presented it to the Emperor who gave him in reward a robe of honour and a purse containing a thousand rupees.

A Broom of Eyelashes !

On another occasion, Naziri was asked by Jahangir to write an inscription for a palace which he was building. Instantaneously he recited a *qasida* containing the following exquisite compliment to the prince :

ای خاک درت صندل سر گشته سران را
بادا مژه جاروب رخت تا جوران را *

O Thou, the dust of whose threshold is the *sandal*
(powder) for the heads of wanderers,
May the eyelashes of crowned kings serve as a
broom for thy path !

For this compliment the Emperor bestowed on him three thousand acres of land.

‘ King of the Region of Eloquence ’

In India Naziri had poetical contests with eminent bards such as Anisi, Urfi and Shakibi, Malik Qumi and Zuhuri. With one voice, however, all critics and biographers give the palm to Naziri. Ali Quli Daghistani puts it daintily in the characteristic Persian style : ‘ Maulana Naziri Nishapuri, king of the region of eloquence, has made the foot of discourse reach so high that the royal falcon of thought, in spite of a thousand wings and arms, has not the daring to soar in that expanse.’

The poet Sa’ib, himself celebrated for his odes, said of Naziri :

صائب چه خیالست شوی همچو نظیری
عرفی به نظیری نرسانید سخن را *

O Sa’ib, what a silly fancy to be the equal of Naziri !

Even Urfi could not soar so high in his discourse.

What’s in a Name ? Lots !

It is related that another poet having adopted the *takhallus* (pen-name) Naziri, it was considered necessary to distinguish Muhammad Husain as Naziri of Nishapur. A council of poets, however, ordained that the renowned and opulent poet should purchase one letter (the final *ya*) from his poor namesake at the price of 10,000 rupees (*ya* in the Abjad system being the numeral ten). This was cheerfully agreed to, so that with one stroke of the pen the poor ‘ Naziri ’ became ‘ Nazir ’, but at the same time he became richer than he ever expected to be as ‘ Naziri ’.

Zuhuri: The Poet Laureate of Bijapur

WHILE still in Khurasan, the fame of Mulla Nuru'd-din, known by his *takhallus*, *Zuhuri*, had spread far and wide. At the instance of friends who prevailed upon him to display his poetic talents to the outside world and to compete with the poets of other provinces, Zuhuri repaired to Yazd, which was then a rendezvous of men of letters. Here he was warmly received by Nawab Mir Ghiyathu'd-din Mir Miran. Zuhuri soon raised himself in the estimation of the Nawab and was regarded as an ornament of the assemblies and meetings held in the darbar of that patron of learning.

From Yazd the poet migrated to Shiraz where in the assemblies of poets he had his duels with Muhtasham Kashi, Ghairati, Anisi and Riza'i. These poetical contests, be it noted, were held in the shop of a baker, named Mirza Husain. That battle-field of combat affords incidentally a striking illustration of the popularity of such contests and the genius of the Persian people, both high and low, to appreciate the gift of poetic composition. The poet hoped for appreciation and patronage from the court of Shah Abbas the Great, but he, too, like Kauthari, found no purchaser of his verses of deep import. With his soul embittered, he hastened to Hindustan and selected Ahmadnagar for his residence. Soon he was appointed poet laureate at the court of Burhan Nizam Shah.

When the Khan-i-Khanan wrested the kingdom of Ahmadnagar from Burhan Nizam Shah, he showed much kindness to Zuhuri and entreated the poet to accompany

him to Agra. The poet in gratitude acknowledged in a *qasida* the graciousness of the Khan, but begged to be excused on the plea that he wished to proceed on a pilgrimage to Mecca. Such a request the Khan could not refuse and Zuhuri stayed at Bijapur until he started on his last long journey to the abode of the blessed.

Elephant load of Gold

For the *Sāqī Nāma*, which Zuhuri composed in praise of Burhan Nizam Shah, the monarch sent him a reward of several elephants loaded with gold, silver and other presents. The poet was sitting in a coffee-house when that treasure was taken to him. When the messenger asked for a receipt, he wrote on a slip of paper the following four words :

تسليم کردند تسليم کردم

They surrendered (the presents); I saluted.

Here is a pun on the word تسليم which means acknowledgment as well as the form of salutation in which a person bows and makes three different movements of the hand by way of salutation.

Having thus acknowledged the Shah's bounty, the contented man of letters there and then distributed all the riches among the poor and the needy.

A Unique Pair of Poets

FROM Ahmadnagar Zuhuri proceeded to Bijapur. Here he was introduced to the nobles of the court, and the poet laureate of the place, Malik Qumi, gave him his daughter in marriage. Both the poets flourished under the patronage of Ibrahim Adil Shah and, to quote the words of Iskandar Munshi, the famous historian of the court of Shah Abbas, 'brought the book of Nauras (نورس) in the string of poetry', each contributing 4,500 verses, and receiving a reward of 9,000 gold coins from the king.¹

No wonder the prosperity and glory of those two favourites of fortune should excite the jealousy of other poets. Zuhuri, for instance, had a poor opinion of the two masters of the art of poesy and he did not conceal it, as will be seen from the following couplets addressed to Adil Shah :

در مدح ثنایت ای شهیدشاه دکن
 معذورم دارگر نه گفتیم مخزن *
 میپسند که بهر یک شتر زرگیرم
 خون دو هزار بیت بر گردن *

O Shahinshah of Deccan, forgive me
 For not writing in thy praise a poem like the
Makhzan.²

¹ *Ālam-Ārā-i-Abbāsī*, Habib Ganj Library, MSS. Fol. 79, quoted by Professor Ghani in his *History of Persian Language and Literature at the Mughal Court*, Vol. III, p. 189.

² An allusion to the *Makhzanu'l Asrār* of Nizami in imitation of which the two bards had composed their poems.

Approve it not, that for the sake of a camel-load
 of gold
 I should be guilty of the blood of two thousand
 poor verses.

The Holy Dust of Bijapur

In Bijapur Zuhuri enjoyed all comfort and amusement. This he acknowledges in the most glowing tribute ever paid to a city :

گر اکسیر سرور و سرور سازند * ز خاک پاک بیجاپور سازند

If they make the elixir of hilarity and enjoyment,
 They make it from the holy dust of Bijapur.

Poet Sa'ib Plays the Truant

Mirza Muhammad Ali was a favourite of Shah Abbas and Shah Sulaiman Safawi. Under the nom de plume of *Sa'ib* he composed *ghazals* in a new style. After a pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, he started on a journey to Hindustan with a view to attaching himself to the court of the Emperor Jahangir. When, however, he reached Kabul, the governor of the place, Zafar Khan, induced him to take up his residence with him.

On the death of Jahangir, Shah Jahan bestowed the government of Kabul on Lashkar Khan. Zafar Khan, accompanied by *Sa'ib*, hastened to the presence of the new sovereign who was then engaged in making conquests in the Deccan. Here *Sa'ib* remained for some time until his father went to him to take him back to his native country Isfahan. *Sa'ib* wrote a beautiful *qasida* for Khwajah Abu'l Hasan and his son, Zafar Khan,

entreating them to permit him to depart. The last lines may be quoted as being illustrative of the poet's style as well as of Persian poetry generally :

مقصود او ز آمدنش بردن منست
لب را بحرف رخصت من کن گهر نثار *
با جبهه کشاده تر از آفتاب صبح
دست دعا بیدرقه راه من برآر *

His object in coming is to take me (to Iran),
Cause thy lips to scatter pearls (of speech) by
uttering the word Permission ;
With a forehead more open than the morning sun
Raise thy hand in prayer, to speed me on my way.

In the meantime the Emperor appointed Zafar Khan governor of Kashmir. Sa'ib thereupon changed his mind and accompanied Zafar Khan to the Switzerland of the East. After some months, however, he returned to Isfahan where he was appointed *Malikush Shu'arā* to Shah Abbas the Second.

A Wonderful Improvisator

AS a composer of impromptu verses the fame of Sa'ib spread throughout the literary world. To test his powers, Khwajah Abu'l Hasan Zafar Khan sent for some eminent poets and asked them to compose a hemistich which it would be impossible to embody in a couplet. They put their heads together and produced the following jingle :

دویدن رفتن استادان نشستن خفتن و مردن

To run, to walk, to stand, to sit, to lie, to die.

Sa'ib was then called upon to form a couplet incorporating this hemistich. The born improvisator was not at all perturbed. By prefixing the following hemistich to the meaningless line, he quickly and aptly evolved sense out of what appeared to be, and in fact was intended to be, devoid of sense or meaning :

بقدر هر سکون راحت بود بنگر مراقب را

The couplet, as thus completed, reads in translation :

There is a degree of comfort in proportion to every pose ;

Observe the stages, to run, to walk, to stand, to sit, to lie, to die !

On another occasion Sa'ib was given the following hemistich for being woven into a couplet :

سگ نشسته ز استاد سر بلند تر است

A dog, when sitting, holds his head higher than
when (he is) standing.

Sa'ib forthwith capped it with the following :

شرد ز گوشه نشینی فرون رعزت خاق

The completed verse meant :

By sitting in a corner one gains in the refinement
of disposition,

(Just as) a dog, when sitting, holds his head higher
than when (he is) standing.

On Stealing a Kiss

Here is another flash of genius on the theft of a kiss,
a topic beloved of bards of all ages and of all climes :

دزدی بوسه عجب دزدی خوش عاقبت است
که اگر باز ستانند دو چندان گردد *

Stealing a kiss is a wonderful theft ; how pleasing
the end in any case !

For should it be taken back, it is doubled
forsooth !

Again,

بوسه بمن دادی ورنجیده * باز ستان گر نه پسندیده

Thou gavest me a kiss ; art thou sorry for it ?

Snatch it back, if thou art not pleased with it !

These but the Trappings and the Suits of Woe!

BEFORE he mounted the throne, Aurangzib was much addicted to the pleasures of the chase. Amongst his followers was a young poet who amused him by his witticisms and lively sallies, but who died prematurely to the chagrin of his royal friend. On the following day, however, the prince rode out hunting. His retinue soon disappeared about the plain in pursuit of game. Seeing the prince alone, Mir Askari, who had come to Hindustan from Iran and had attached himself to the royal court, approached the Emperor and asked him how in the midst of grief for the loss of his lamented friend he could ride out.

Aurangzib tried to impress upon the poet that he did not believe in the conventional modes of mourning. 'The customary suits of solemn black,' the dejected 'haviour of the visage,' and 'the fruitful river in the eye' had no meaning for him. Grief and affliction and mourning in seclusion, he observed, did not relieve his mind, nor afforded consolation to his heart, at all equal to the cries of the hounds, the flights of the falcons, the shouts of applause of the pursuing hunters, and the glorious sunshine which illumined the expanse of endless forest with magic portraiture.

The poet was, however, not satisfied with this excuse for what he regarded as sheer callousness, and he repeated offhand the following couplet :

عشق چه آسان نمود آه چه دشوار بود
هجر چه دشوار بود یار چه آسان گرفت *

‘ How sweet is love ! how bitter is the sigh !
How distressing is absence ! But how easily is the
beloved reconciled to it ! ’

The prince was deeply affected. Coming to himself, after sometime, he asked, ‘ whose couplet is it ? ’

‘ Of one,’ said Askari, ‘ who does not wish to be known by his prince as a poet.’

Aurangzib smiled, and repeated the verse until he got it by heart. From that day the poet rose in the prince’s favour.

A Mystic Gift to A Disappointed Bard

THERE have also been instances of disappointed poets drawn to India in the hope of reward. For instance, Ghazali, who went to the Deccan, to seek his fortune, was foiled in his expectations. He was, however, lucky in receiving an invitation from Khan Zaman Ali Quli Khan, Governor of Jaunpur, and went to his province. The letter of invitation deserves special mention for the cryptic reference it contained to the gift of a thousand rupees which accompanied it.

اي غزالي بحق شاه نجف * که سوي بندگان بيچون آئي
چون که بي قدر گشته آنجا * سر خود گير وزود بيرون آي

O Ghazali, I implore thee in the name of the Shah of Najaf (i.e. Ali)

To come to the devotees of the Matchless (God Almighty)!

Since thy worth is not appreciated in that place (the Deccan),

Follow thy inclination and come away soon !

The words سر خود گير require an explanation. The literal meaning would be : 'take thine own head'. This would be the first letter of the poet's name, viz. غ the value of which, in the Abjad notation, is one thousand. The words therefore, mean : 'accept the gift of one thousand rupees sent with the letter.'

Jeering Jealousy

ANOTHER instance of a disgruntled poet is that of Baqar Khurdah, who received no reward for a poem in praise of Sultan Ibrahim Adilshah of Deccan. To his chagrin was added the anguish of jealousy, as another poet, Zuhuri Khurasani, had received a handsome amount for his *qasida*. Baqar thereupon stigmatised the Sultan in the following scathing verses :

خوارند دو جا بد پر ارباب سخن * فرد شه غزنين و شه نيشاه دکن
بي حاصله بردند ظهوري و حسن * بي جايزه ماند شعر فردوسي و من

Miserable are men of letters in two places in the world,

In the court of the King of Ghazna and of the King of the Deccan.

Without merit were rewarded Zuhuri and Hasan,
Without recompense remained the verses of Firdawsi and mine.

‘Hasan’ in these verses refers to Khwaja Hasan Maimandi, Vizier of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna, who, it was believed, was hostile to poet Firdawsi.

Haidar Kullaj Vents His Spleen

THIS outburst of jealousy recalls the biting satire of another versifier, Haidar Kullaj. When the poet Hilali received from Badi'uz Zamān Mirza, on the completion of his poem, several presents including a slave, Mulla Haidar Kullaj presented the following couplets to the prince :

شہا کامگا را بی خادمانت
فرستاده شد زین دعاگو پیامی *
ہلالی غلامی طلب کرد دادی
مرا ہم بدہ چون ہلالی غلامی *

O fortunate king, through thy servants
This well-wisher of thine had submitted a petition.
Hilali asked for a slave and thou gavest it ;
Give me also a slave like Hilali.

The sting lay in the words چون ہلالی غلامی which have a double meaning : (1) a slave such as the one you gave to Hilali and (2) a slave like Hilali.

A Satirist Quotes Scriptures!

NUMEROUS are the anecdotes of such poetic contests and in several of them we find the satirist playing on the name of his rival. The following satire by Mulla Shaida on Talib is an example :

شب و روز مخدومنا طالبا * پی جیفه دنیوی در تگست
مگر قول پیغمبرش یاد نیست * که دنیاست مردار و طالب سگست

Night and day our master Talib

Is running after this carcass of the world.

Perhaps he remembers not the words of the Prophet :

‘ This world is a carrion and he who hankers after it is a dog.’

طالب سگست would also mean ‘Talib is a dog,’ so that the last line would mean : ‘ This world is carrion and Talib is a dog.’ The pun gains in piquancy when it is remembered that these are purported to be the words of the Prophet.

Sweet Content !

It may be noted that Talib was an accomplished poet on whom his contemporaries had voluntarily conferred the title of Ustad (master). The Emperor Jahangir had appointed him *Maliku'sh Shu'arā* and he also wanted to appoint him Lord Privy Seal. The poet, however, gratefully declined the honour.

چو مهر تو دارم چه حاجت بهم * مرا مهر داری به از مهر داری

Since I possess thy love, what need have I of the seal?

Better to have thy love than to possess thy seal.

A Poet that Deserved to be Hung !

HERE is another instance of a poet (Katibi) inditing a lampoon on a brother poet :

دي بدرک بدرک را گفتم که نه شاعر
آن کز شعرا باشد انديختنش بايد *
گفتا که بهر شهري آويخته ام شعري
شعر آن که چنان گوید آويختنش بايد *

Yesterday I said to the ill-conditioned little Badr,
‘ Thou art no poet !

He who is of the poets, him should one encourage.’

‘ In every city ’, he replied, ‘ I have hung up a poem.’¹

One who produces such poetry ought (himself) to be hung.²

¹ In olden times poets used to suspend their verses on the gates of cities, as that was then the only mode of publication. The boast of Badr was that he had produced a prize poem in every city.

² As rendered by Browne.

Verses without Salt in them

RASHIDI and Amaq Bukhari were rival poets in the court of Khizr Khan. Once the Sultan asked Bukhari, the poet laureate, what his opinion of Rashidi as a poet was.

‘He is a good poet’, said Bukhari, ‘but his verses have no salt in them.’

The Sultan asked Rashidi, on whom he had conferred the title of ‘Lord of Poets’ (*Sayyid ush Shu‘arā*), ‘What have you got to say to this?’

Turning towards Bukhari, Rashidi immediately brought him to the floor with the following stinging verses :

شعر هاي مرا به بي نمكي * عيب كردي روا بود شايد
شعر من همچو شكر و شهد است * اندر بن دو نمك نكو نايد
شلجم و باقلاست گفته تو * نمك اي قلتبان ترا بايد

My verses have no salt in them ;
Thus hast thou stigmatized my verse ; thou art
right perchance !
My verse is honey-flavoured, sugar-sweet,
With sugar and honey salt can give no delight.
Beans and turnip are the stuff thou produceth,
Salt, O villain, is indispensable to thee !

Khizr Khan, says the author of *Chahār Maqālā*, was so delighted with this ruthless but spirited retort that he bestowed on Rashidi a thousand gold dinars.

Taking Salt from Arzu's Tray

THE idea of saltishness of poems sometimes inspires different sentiments, as may be seen from the following anecdote concerning two friendly poets, Hakim of Lahore and Khan Arzu. Arzu's name was Siraju'd-din Ali. He was born in Akbarabad in 1689 and distinguished himself in the court of Delhi. Once Hakim paid a graceful compliment to Arzu in the following lines with which he concluded a *ghazal* :—

کَر چنڊين از فيض خان آرزو گيرد نمک
طرفه شورى اين غزل حاکم بلاهر افکند *

Were this *ghazal* to take salt (elegance) from the
bounty of Arzu's tray,
It would, O Hakim, cause commotion in Lahore !

There is in this verse a pun on the word شورى which means commotion as well as saltishness. Khan Arzu, therefore, in returning the compliment, played on the word حاکمى which means 'Thou art Hakim,' as well as 'thou mayst please thyself.'

نيسست شعر آرزو را رتبه * کَر تو با اين هم پسندى حاکمى

Arzu's verses do not hold any high rank ;
Shouldst thou, nevertheless, like them, thou
mayst please thyself.

Salt and Salt Cellar

IN the following pleasant quip salt and salt-cellar have quite a different significance :

میان شهر نیشاپور سیمی
چو اشعار ملیح کاتبی دید *
بمشهد رفت و بر نام خودش بست
نمک خورد و نمکدان را بدزدید *

When in the city of Nishapur
Simi saw the delicious verses of Katibi,
He went to Mashhad and produced them in his
own name,
He ate the salt and stole the salt-cellar !

Poet Simi taught calligraphy to Katibi, but, surely, tutorship does not give the right to plagiarize !

A Dubious Exchange of Compliments

Once Majdu'd-din Hamgar was asked to give his opinion as to the respective merits of himself, Sa'di and Imami of Herat, the panegyrist of the rulers and ministers of Kirman. The query was put in verse and the poet's reply was also given in verse as follows :—

ما کرچه بنطق طوطی خوش نفسیم
بر شکر گفته های سعدی مگسیم *
در شیوه شاعری باجماع اُمم
هرگز من و سعدی بامامی نرسیم *

‘ Though I in song am like the tuneful birds,
Fly-like I sip the sweets of Sa’di’s words;
Yet all agree that in the art of speech
Sa’di and I can n’er Imami reach.’ ¹

This compliment evoked an eulogy from Imami in the following quatrain :—

در صدر بلاغت ارچه با دست رسم
در عالم نظم ارچه مسیحا نقسم *
دائم که بخاک در دستور جهان
سحبان زمانه معبد همگر نرسم *

‘ Though throned in power in eloquence’s fane,
And, Christ-like, raising song to life again,
Ne’er to the dust of Majd-i-Hamgar’s door,
That Sahban of the Age, can I attain.’ ¹

On the other hand, Sa’di, who had reason to be offended at Hamgar’s attempt to belittle him, vented his spleen in the following verse :—

هر کس که بپایگاه سامی نرسد
از بخت بد و سیاه کامی نرسد *
همگر چو بعمر خود نکر دست نماز
آری چه عجب گویا نامی نرسد *

‘ Who’er attaineth not position high,
His hopes are foiled by evil destiny.
Since Hamgar flees from all who pray or preach,
No wonder he “ can ne’er Imami reach.” ’ ¹

There is here a pun on the word *Imāmī*, which was the poet’s pen-name and which also means the position of an ‘ Imām ’, or leader in prayer.

¹ Browne’s translation, *History of Persian Literature*, Vol. III.

A Challenge to Shah Jahan

TO revert to the poets of the courts of India, the Sultan of Turkey once sent a communication to Shah Jahan, stating : ' You are the ruler of Hindustan only ; how dare you call yourself King of the World ? Better change your name ! ' None of the pillars of the State could suggest an appropriate reply to this letter. Shah Jahan, thereupon, sent for Abu Talib Kalim, his poet laureate. Kalim had come out to India from Hamadan and served as a soldier in the army of Jahangir. Whether a soldier or a shop-keeper, in nine cases out of ten, an Irani has the talent for versification, and Kalim, who excelled in this natural gift, had risen to the position of the king of poets in the reign of Shah Jahan. He suggested an ingenious reply as under :—

هند و جهان ز روي عدد هر دو چون يکيست
شه را خطاب شاه جهاني مقرر است *

India and the World in numerical value are equal,
Therefore has been assigned to us the title of the
' King of the World.'

According to the Abjad notation هند (India) and جهان (World) are each equivalent to 59. The poet, who combined the knowledge of notation with the art of versification, thus turned the tables on the opponent.

How Can Water Be Dashed to Pieces ?

Kalim, however, found a match in Nur Jahan, the wife of Jahangir, whose life was itself a poem. She often

used to find fault with Kalim's verses. He, therefore, once sent her a challenge, defying her to find any defect in the following verses :

ز شرم آب شدم کاب را شکستی نیست
بحیرتم که مرا روزگار چون بشکست *

From shame I turned water; though water cannot
be broken,
I am astonished that fortune could dash me to
pieces !

Nur Jahan was ready with the explanation :

یخ بست و شکست

Water became ice and was broken.

Kalim was floored ; for several days thereafter he refrained from putting in an appearance at the court.

Poetic Duels between Nur Jahan and Jahangir

BETWEEN Jahangir and Nur Jahan also there were frequent sallies of wit. Once, while standing on a terrace, they saw a man going along the road, bent down with age. Jahangir thereupon asked :

چرا خم کشته می کردند پیران جهاندایده

Why do old persons, having witnessed (the ways of) the world, go about body bent?

Nur Jahan promptly replied :

بزر خاک میجویند ایام جوانی را

In the dust they seek the days of their youth.

On another occasion Jahangir observed :

بلبل نیستم که نعره کنم درد سر دهم

پروانه ام که بسوزم و دم بر نیارم *

I am not the Bulbul that I should give a headache to others by my lamentations ;

I am the moth that burns but does not complain.

Nur Jahan's luminous response was :

پروانه من نیستم که بیک شعله جان دهم

شمع که شب بسوزم و دم بر نیارم *

I am not a moth that I should lose my life in a single flash,

I am the candle that burns all night but doth not flinch for a moment.

Fine Fancy

ONCE Jahangir observed on Nur Jahan's garments stains of saffron-water, which in India is sprinkled over garments both as a perfume and as a symbol of good omen. Thereupon he remarked :—

نیست جانان بر گریبان تو رنگ زعفران
زردی رنگ رخ من شد گریبان گیر تو *

Beloved, the stain on thy collar is not the stain of saffron ;
It is the yellow hue of my face that has caught hold of thee by the collar.

Nur Jahan's ready and resplendent reply was :

ترا که تکه لعل است بر لباس حریر
شده است قطره خون منّت گریبان گیر *

The ruby button that glistens on thy silk shirt
Is the drop of my blood that has caught you by the collar (demanding retribution).

Sultana Mahsati's Impromptu

ONE of the wives of Sultan Sanjar, Mahsati, could also turn a verse. One day the Sultan asked her, 'What is the state of the weather?' She went to the window and noticed that it had snowed. This condition of the weather she described in charming verses as follows :—

شاهها فلکت اسپ سعادت زین کرد
و ز جمله خسروان ترا تحسین کرد *
تا در حرکت مرکب زرین نعلت
بر گل نهد پای زمین سیمین کرد *

O King, the sky has put the saddle on the horse
of thy fortune ;
And of all princes has chosen thee for distinction.
That thy horse, shod with gold, may not have to
tread on earth,
It has covered the earth with silver.

Dilaram's Check

SHAH JAHAN was once engaged in a game of chess with a Persian prince. It was agreed that whoever lost the game should give the winner one of the ladies of the harem. When a certain position was reached, the prince threatened mate in a few moves. Shah Jahan could see no way of averting what appeared to be an inevitable defeat. He, therefore, went to the harem to consider which of the Begums he should give away. One of them, by name *Jahan* Begum (the World), said :

تو پادشاه جهانی جهان ز دست مده

که پادشاه جهان را جهان بکار آید *

The King of the world (*Jahan*) thou art; do not
let go the World (*Jahan*) from thy hands,
For the King of the World cannot do without the
World.

Another lady, whose name was *Hayat* Begum (Life),
put in a plea in her behalf in the following words :

جهان خوش است ولیکن حیات میباید

اگر حیات نباشد جهان چه کار آید *

Pleasant is the world, but (to enjoy it) there should
be life (*Hayat*),
If there is no life, of what use is the world ?

A third, bearing the inauspicious name *Fanā* Begum (Destruction), also entreated the king not to give her away in verses of deep philosophic import :—

جهان و حیات و همه بی وفاست
طالب کن فنا را که آخر فناست *

Inconstant are the world and life and all else ;
Seek thou Destruction (*Fanā*), as destruction is the
end of all !

Shah Jahan then turned to the most favourite of his Begums, *Dilaram* (Heart's Comfort), to hear what she had to say. She expressed a desire to examine the position. Having studied the position of the different pieces, she saw that by an ingenious series of moves Shah Jahan could not only avert a defeat, but also win the game. These moves she suggested as under :—

شاه دو رخ بده و دلارام مده
بیل و پیاده پیش کن واسپ گشت مات *

Give away two rooks, but do not part with Dilaram,
Advance the elephant (Bishop) and the pawn, and
checkmate with the knight !

One can imagine the quickened pulse-beat with which Shah Jahan rushed with joy to the chess-board and resumed the game. Winning it, he attached himself more than ever before to the beautiful and resourceful Begum.

Zib'un Nisa Begum's Cutting Reply

ZIB'UN NISA BEGUM, the gifted daughter of Aurangzib, also lisped in numbers. Her nom de plume was *Makhfi* (Concealed). A poet once ventured to address her the following lines :

بلبل رویت شوم گر در چمن بینم ترا
 من شوم پروانه گر در انجمن بینم ترا *
 خود نمائی میکنی ای شمع محفل خوب نیست
 من همی خواهم که در یکت پیرهن بینم ترا *

Were I to see thee in a garden, I would become a
 Bulbul (lover) of the rose of thy cheek ;
 And were I to see thee in an assembly, I would
 flutter round thee like a moth.
 Thou art showing thyself to others. O, thou light of
 the assembly, this is not proper!
 I wish I alone could see thee at close quarters.

The Begum cut short such overtures with this reply :—

بلبل از گل بگذرد چون در چمن بیند مرا
 بت پرستی کی کند گر برهن بیند مرا *
 در سخن مخفی شدم مانند بو در برگ گل
 هر که دیدن میل دارد در سخن بیند مرا *

The Bulbul would relinquish the rose, were he to
 see me in the garden ;
 How could he worship the idol, were the Brahman
 to see me ?
 Like perfume in a rose petal I lie hidden in verse ;
 Whoever wishes to see me may behold me in my verse,

The Crow Flew off the Mouth !

ONE day Shah Jahan found, on kissing a beauty of the harem, that the artificial mole on her lips got rubbed off. He merrily observed :

زاغ از دهان پرید

The crow flew off the mouth.

Next day, he repeated the words in court and asked his viziers to compose a couplet incorporating those words. Four viziers, who could also play the poet, tried their skill.

One of them came forward and recited the following lines :

نیافرې چو دوش دهن گرد آورېد
زنبور مست بود که آمد در آن خلید *
چون آفتاب دید دهن خنده را کشاد
در عین خنده بود که زاغ از دهان پرید *

Last evening when the water-lily was about to close its mouth,

An infatuated wasp came and flew into it !

When during the morn the flower saw the sun,
it opened its lips in derision ;

While still it was in laughter, '*the crow flew off the mouth !*'

The second Vizier's solution of the riddle was this :

بد گربه گرسنه و بصحرا همي دويد
زاغي نشسته بر بنكي بي خبر بدید *
چون زاغ را گرفت بموشي نظر فتاد
مي خواست موش گيرد زاغ از دهان پريد *

There was a hungry cat that ran about in the
forest,
She saw a crow sitting on a branch, not knowing
she was there ;
She caught the crow, but spying a mouse,
Upon it she sprang, and '*the crow flew off the
mouth!*'

The third Vizier then recited the following verses :—

شاهين گرفته زاغ بچنگال مي پريد
بحري چو دید صید بدنبال او دويد *
ناگه رسيد باز قضاي خدا نگر
اين هر سه در تحير و زاغ از دهان پريد *

Off with a crow in his talons, a hawk was flying,
flying,
Seeing a heron, after it he darted, glowing, glowing,
Then came a falcon ; now behold the decree of fate !
While stood perplexed those three, '*the crow flew
off the mouth!*'

The fourth Vizier was, however, nearest the mark when he chanted the following lines :

خالی که بود بر لب از آن شهاد می چکید
 هنگام بوسه دادن آن خال را گزید *
 در آینه بدید بلب خال را ندید
 حیران از آن بماند که زاغ از دهان پرید *

From the mole on the lip trickled sweet honey,
 At the time of kissing that mole was rubbed off ;
 She looked into the mirror. There was no mole on
 the lip !

Amazed was she to find that *the crow had flown off
 the mouth !*

Reward and Retribution in one Breath

POET Saidi of Teheran also entertained the court of Shah Jahan with his exquisite verses and witticism. Once, hiding himself in a balcony, he watched Jahan Ara Begum, the king's daughter, when she was promenading in a garden, with her face veiled. Seeing her coming near the place where he was, he exclaimed:—

برقع برخ افکنده برد ناز بباغش * تا نکبت گل بیخته آید بدماعش

‘ With the veil flung on her face, delicacy takes her
to the garden

So that the perfume of the rose be filtered ere it
reaches the brain.’

Charming verses these, but the princess was indignant. She sent for the poet and commanded him to leave the city, but not without a reward of five thousand rupees—a typical illustration of the romance and munificence of the Mughal court !

Court of King or Court of God ?

ONCE Shaikh Muhammad Sa'd Quraishi went to the palace of Shah Jahan and wished to have audience. The emperor was then in the bath and the officer on duty, who belonged to the sect of *chelas*, refused to admit him there. Greatly incensed, the Shaikh composed there and then the following quatrain and sent it to Shah Jahan :—

اي شاه جناب تو جناب الله است
هر حکم تو چون حکم کتاب الله است *
اين چيله ديو فعل مناع دراست
ابليس صفت مانع باب الله است *

O King, thy court is like the court of God ;
Every command of thine is like the injunction of
the Book of God.
This demon-like *Chela* keeps off people from thy
door ;
Possessing the attributes of Satan, he blocks access
to the door of God.

Amused by these scathing verses, Shah Jahan ordered that in future the Shaikh should be admitted to all parts of the palace with the exception only of the harem.

A Vizier's Wine-worship

A SOMEWHAT similar story is related of poet Shapur Nishapuri. He wished to enlist himself in the service of Khwajah Nuru'd-din, Vizier of Sultan Jalalu'd-din Muhammad Khwarizm Shah. This man of noble descent appears to have been a great admirer of Junaidi's wine song and to have translated his admiration into action:—

شب گیر صبح را ز سرگیر * بر بانگ خروس و ناله زیر
خورشید که برزند سر از کوه * آن به که خورد ز جام تشویر
از جام بجام در شبانگاه * و ز جام بجام روز بشب گیر
شیرست غذای کودک خرد * شیره از غذای مردم پیر

' At dawn quaff a draught from the flagon of wine,
By crow of the cock and the kite's plaintive whine,
When the sun lifts his head o'er the top of the hill,
He were best put to blush by the cup and the vine.
From the cup to the couch at the fall of night time,
From the couch to the cup at the dayspring's first sign.
As *milk* is the food that for infants is best,
So old men their diet to grape-milk confine.' ¹

¹ Jackson's translation in *Early Persian Poetry*. There is a pun on the word شیر (*shir*), milk and شیراز (*shirah*) new wine.

The poet could not, therefore, get audience for five consecutive days. Each time he called, he was told that the Khwajah was in his cups. He called once more and pressed for admission. The Khwajah was informed of his arrival, but he sent word that the poet would only be admitted if he could compose some verses appropriate to the occasion. Forthwith the gifted versifier inscribed on a piece of paper the following lines :—

فضل تو و این باده پرستی با هم * مانند بالندی است و پستی با هم
 حال تو بچشم ماهرویان مانند * کانه است مدام نور و مستی با هم

The blending of thy excellence with wine
 worship

Is like the union of height with depth.

Thy state resembles that of the eyes of the moon-
 faced (beauties),

Wherein are constantly blended light and
 intoxication.

Haidari's Invocation

POET Haidari of Tabriz also found it difficult to get access to one of the Mughal emperors of India. He had written a *qasida*, but could get no opportunity to recite it in the royal presence. He, therefore, addressed the following verses to the king, incorporating at the end of the panegyric a couplet of Hafiz :

در مدح پادشاه سخن سنج ملک یزد
 گفتم قصیده که پسندید هر که دید *
 اما چو روزگار مددگار ما نبود
 زان شاخ گل بپای دلم خار غم خلید *
 نشنید شاه عقده مصرعی زمن
 نگشوده قفل آرزوی من ازان کلید *
 بودم ز آب دیده خود غرق بحر خون
 کز عیب این ترا نه بگوش دلم رسید *
 حافظ وظیفه تو دعا گفتن است و بس
 در بند آن مباش که نشنید یا شنید *

In the praise of the discerning (word-weighing)
 Emperor of India

I wrote a poem applauded by every one.

As, however, fortune did not favour me,

Instead of getting a flower from the rose-bush my
 heart got pricked by a thorn.

The bountiful monarch did not hear a single line ;

With that key could not be oped the padlock of
 my hopes.

In the torrent (tears) of my own eyes I was
 drowned, as if in the ocean of blood,
 When I heard some one singing this verse from the
 unseen world :
 'Hafiz, thy duty is to sing praises, and that should
 suffice ;
 Do not worry as to whether thy words are heard
 or not heard.'

Pleased with these verses, the emperor ordered that
 a sum of money and a robe of honour be presented to
 the poet. Haidari had, however, to wait for a good long
 time, owing to the dilatoriness of the treasurer, and had
 to send the following metrical reminder to the emperor :

مشکلي دارم شها خواهم کنم پيش تو عرض
 ز آنکه زين مشکل مرا صد داغ حسرت بردل است *
 سيم و زر انعام کردي ليک از خازن مرا
 هم گرفتن مشکل و هم نذا گرفتن مشکل است *

O Prince, I am labouring under a difficulty ; I wish
 to bring it to your notice,
 Because owing to this difficulty my heart is
 afflicted with a thousand sorrows.
 Thou didst order (that I should be rewarded with)
 gold and silver, but from the treasurer
 It is hard to secure the treasure ; and hard, too, for
 me to do without it !

Needless to add that after this diplomatic communi-
 cation the poet received the reward without further
 delay.

A Mixed Effusion of Praise and Complaint !

HAFIZ himself, though highly honoured and rewarded by princes in Iran as well as in India, had to complain at times of the indifference of the sovereigns at whose altars much incense was burnt without avail. Here is a specimen of mixed feelings of gratitude and resentment :

شاه هرموزم ندید و بی سخن صد لطف کرد
شاه یزدم دید و مدحش گفتم و هیچم نداد *
کار شاهان این چنین باشد تو ای حافظ مرنج
داور روزی رسان توفیق و نصرت شان دهد *

The King of Hormuz did not see me, yet without
a word of praise (from me) bestowed on me a
hundred favours.

The King of Yezd gave me audience, and I praised
him, but he gave me nothing.

Such are the ways of the kings ; be not thou vexed,
O Hafiz !

May God, the giver of daily bread, vouchsafe them
His grace and guidance !

A Horse Famous for Fasting !

ABDUR RAZAQ ISFAHANI has left for the edification of struggling and starving bards another specimen of artful application for allowances. In the following verses addressed to his patron he relates facetiously the story of his fasting horse.

صایم الدهر اسپکی دارم * که بده روز روزه بکشاید
 در رکوعست سال و مه لیکن * که گهی در سهجود افزاید
 پاره کاه آرزو کردست * مدتی رفت و بر نمی آید
 روز عید است و هر کسی امروز * به طعامی دهن بیالاید
 گر تفضل کند خداوندم * پاره کاه و جو بفرماید
 ورنه رخصت دهد که اندر شرع * روزه عید داشتن شاید

I have a little horse famous through the world (for fasting),

Because he breaks his fast every ten days.

All the year round he keeps his head bowed in prayer,

But at times he takes to genuflexion.

He has been longing for a morsel of hay,

A long time has elapsed, but it is not forthcoming.

It is the day of *Eid* and every one to-day

With viands fills his mouth ;

Let my lord, by way of generosity,

Order the supply of a little quantity of hay and barley,

Or issue an edict that, according to religion,

Fasting is incumbent on the day of *Eid* !

Story of a Black Horse

HERE is a satirical narration of the story of a black horse presented to Salman Sawaji:

شاه مرا به اسپ موعود کرده بودی
در قول پادشاهان قیلي دیگر نباشد *
اسپی سیاه و پیرم دادند و من بر آنم
کاندر جهان سیاهی زان پیر تر نباشد *
آن اسپ باز دادم تا دیگری ستانم
در صورتی که کس را زن سر خبر نباشد *
اسپ سیه بدادم رنگ دیگر ندادند
آری پس از سیاهی رنگ دیگر نباشد *

O King, thou hadst promised me a horse ;
A king's word cannot be replaced by another word ;
They gave me an old black horse, and I am sure,
In the world there is no deeper black than this !
I returned the horse, so that I might get another
In such a way that none might get a hint of the
transaction.
I gave the black horse away, but they did not give
me one of another colour ;
Verily, ' Beyond black there is no other colour !'

In the same vein the poet harps on the same theme :

شاه امید بود که خواهم بدولت
بر مرکبی بلند و جوان و روان نشست *

اسپیم پیر و کاهل و کوته همی دهند
 اسپیی نه آن چنان که توانم بر آن نشست *
 چون کلک مرکبی سیاه و سیست و لاغرست
 جهل مرکب است بر اسپیی چنان نشست *
 از بنده مهترست به سبی سال و راستی
 گستاخی است بر زبر مهتران نشست *

O Prince, I had hopes that with thy favour,
 I shall ride on a horse, tall, young and fleet,
 They gave me a horse old, feeble and stunted,
 A horse not even such as I could mount.
 Dark, dull and thin like the reed-pen is he ;
 Ink-dark folly would it be to ride such an animal.
 He is thirty years my senior in age, and in sooth
 It would be impudence *to sit above one's seniors !*

A Garment Illumined by the 'Suns of Prophets'!

SALMAN'S satire recalls the story of an old garment presented to poet Mulla Muhammad Assar by the Shaikhu'l Islam. Such a present from a religious head was generally regarded as a great honour and the cast-off garment was worn by the recipient, for some days, in public. As, however, the poet did not relish the idea of going about shabbily dressed, he conveyed his excuse to the Shaikh in the following sarcastic verses:

جامه بخشید شیخ اسلام اعظم بنده را
 و مبارک جامه سال فراوان یافته *
 رشته حوا از برای آدمش در بدو حال
 مریمنش در کار داد از بهر عیسی یافته *
 و آنکه از منقول پشم ذوق بدیدمش
 فاطمه کشیده رفونر هر کجا بشناخته *
 من چه حد دارم که بوشم جامه را کاندراو
 آفتاب طلعت چندین پیمبر تافته *

The Shaikhu'l Islam has presented me with a robe ;
 O blessed garment that has attained a good long age !
 In the beginning of Creation its warp was prepared
 by mother Eve for Adam ;
 Mary wove it in the loom for Jesus.
 Then with the wool taken from the Prophet's camel
 Fatimah mended wherever it was rent.
 What is my worth that I should put on a garment
 Illumined by the suns of so many prophets ?

Katibi's Wail

BITTER also was the wail of Katibi Nishapuri :

خسروا از خورد و پوش من نداري آگهي
چون بباشد هر دم از تو ناکه و افغان مرا *
نيستم کعبه که در سالي دهبي یک جاءء ام
يا نيم گردون که روزي بس بود یک نان مرا *

O Prince, thou hast no idea of what I get for
diet or my clothing.

Why should I not every moment upbraid thee ?

I am not the Ka'bah that thou should'st give me
a single piece of garment for the whole year ;

Nor am I the revolving sky that a single loaf of
bread should suffice for me for the day.

The 'single garment' referred to the covering for
the Ka'bah, which was annually presented by the Khalif
on the occasion of the Eid of Pilgrimage. The 'single
bread' is an allusion to the sun, which is compared to a
round loaf of bread.

Kamalu'd-din's Biting Satire

IN striking contrast to the gentle remonstrances of disappointed bards comes this biting satire from Kamalu'd-din Ismail :

غله کامسال داد خواجه مرا * گر نه بُد جمله بود اکثر خاک
نسبت خاک و گندمش با هم * همچنان بد که تخم اندر خاک
خاک مردم خورد ندانستم * که خورد مردم ای برادر خاک

For the most part, if not wholly,
The corn that the Khwajah gave me this year was
mostly earth.

The proportion of wheat to earth
Was equivalent to that of the seed to the soil.
The earth devours men (when dead and buried),
but, my brother,
I knew it not that men too eat earth!

It seems poor Kamal had an altogether unhappy experience of the illiberality of the people he met, for in the following words he facetiously speaks of the stinginess of the entire population of Iran :

مدارای مردان ایران زمین
دو فنجان قهوه است و یک آفرین *

The civility of the people of Iran
Consists of two cups of coffee and one 'Bless
you'!

What a lampoon for a nation renowned for its hospitality !

An Irate Panegyrist

RATHER an outspoken bard was Rashidi Samarqandi. He could not disguise his contempt for the niggardly Vizier whose praises he had sung.

تو وزيري ومنت مدحت گوي
دست من بي عطا روا بيني *
تو وزارت بمن سپار و مرا
مدحتي گوي تا عطا بيني *

Thou art a Vizier and I sang thy praises ;
Thou, however, thinkest it fit to keep me empty-handed ;
Entrust me with the Viziership awhile ; and in my praise
A few words say, that thou mayst see what generosity is !

It is refreshing, after these wails, to light upon stanzas expressing the heartfelt gratitude of numerous poets handsomely rewarded by their masters. We have already noted several cases. Only one more classical instance may be mentioned.

The New Moon

ONE evening, on the festival of Eid, Sultan Malik-shah went up to the terrace, bow in hand, to look for the new moon. He was the first to see the moon and was greatly pleased. It was contrived by the King's intimate companion and son-in-law, Amir Ali Framarz Alau'd-dawla, that a poor poet whom he wanted to bring to the notice of the Sultan should be present. Artfully he asked his protégé to recite some verses befitting the occasion. The poet forthwith chanted:

ای ماه کمان شهر یاری گوئی
یا ابروی آن طرفه نگاری گوئی *
نعلی زده از زر عیاری گوئی
در دوش سپهر گو شـواری گوئی *

‘O Moon! say, art thou the bow of the King?
Or the arched eyebrow of that unique Beauty?
Say, art thou a horse-shoe wrought of gold
refined?
Or a ring depending low from the Heaven's ear?’

‘When I had submitted these verses,’ says the poet, ‘Amir Ali applauded, and the King said: “Go, loose from the stables whichever horse thou pleasest!” When I was close to the stable, Amir Ali selected a horse which was brought out and given to my attendants, and which proved to be worth 300 dinars of Nishapur. The King then went to his oratory, and I performed the evening prayer, after which he sat down to dinner. At the table Amir Ali said: “O son of Burhani! Thou hast not yet

said anything about this favour conferred on thee by the lord of the world. Compose a quatrain at once!" I thereupon sprang to my feet and recited these two couplets :—

چون آتش خاطر مرا شاه بدید
از خاک مرا بر زبر ماه کشید *
چون آب یکی تَرانه از من بشنید
چون باد یکی مرکب خاصم بخشید *

The King beheld the *fire* which in me blazed :
Me from the *earth* above the moon he raised :
From me a verse, like *water* fluent, heard,
And swift as *wind* a noble steed conferred.'

It will be noticed that each of the four lines contains the name of one of the four elements. Greatly charmed, the Sultan bestowed on the gifted bard a thousand dinars. It is said that it was on this occasion that the King suggested to the poet that he should assume the pen-name *Mu'izzi*, derived from his own name *Mu'izu'd dunya wa'd din* (the Glorifier of the World and the Faith).

Worse than the Assassin's Dagger

TWO brothers by name Salami (adept in salutations) and Kalami (accomplished in speech) composed a poem in praise of Vizier Muhammad Sharif of Isfahan. Either because the panegyric was of no special merit, or because the Vizier was close-fisted, they received no reward. They, however, kept on frequenting the audience-chamber. Tired of being thus pestered, the Vizier at last dismissed the rhymesters with a small present *plus* this handsome compliment !

دو چیز است بدتر ز تیغ حرامی

کلام سلاهی سلام کلامی *

There are two things worse than the sword of an assassin,

The *kalam* (words) of Salami (the expert in the art of salutation) and the *salam* (greeting) of Kalami (the adept in the art of speaking).

One should know Persian to enjoy the exquisite play on the words *Salam* and *Kalam*.

Exit the Court Poet

SO long as Persian continued to be the polite language of India the poets of the Indian durbars produced what has been aptly called the 'Indian Summer' of Persian poetry during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The literary output of the eighteenth century, in Iran as well as in India, was the most meagre. The gloom of that epoch was dispelled by some of the stars of the nineteenth century such as Qa'ani, Furughi and Wisal. These luminaries were, however, eclipsed by the new school of poets produced by the Persian Revolution in 1906. Of these the most eminent are Dakhaw (Dih-Khuda), Arif, Sayyid Ashraf and Bahar.

With the political pulsations came into being the free press of Iran. In a country where formerly the press and the public platform resounded with laudatory verses addressed to the kings and courtiers, in a land where political affairs could be discussed by the people only in whispers and where the press was economically of no significance, journals sprang up which freely criticised the administrative problems and the political events of the day. None was immune from their criticism, be he an official, or a minister, or the king himself. Their columns were full of verses condemning in scathing satire the unpatriotic actions of those in authority and stirring the youth of the land to deeds of heroism and effacement of self in the cause of the motherland.

When a country thus pulsates with political aspirations, when the once docile populace finds itself caught in the whirlpool of constitutional struggles and convulsions, there is no place for panegyrists of royal patrons. No

wonder the poet of the 'Rule Britannia' or 'God Save the King' type gave place in the land of the Shah to those of the 'God Save Ireland', or '*Bande Mataram*', brand.

The constitution may be said to have given a deadly blow to court poetry, though not to monarchy. After the vicissitudes of the constitutional convulsions, kingship has come into its own once more, so that to-day the Persian people prefer the rule of a strong monarch such as Reza Shah Pahlawi to the dreams of constitutional government such as the vision recalled in the following stanza in a ballad ascribed to a poetess named Minara Khanim, but published over the pen-name *Húp-húp*:

نه نه جان خواب بودم خواب دیدم * مشروطه بپاشد نه نه جان
عیش فقرا شد نه نه جان
خواب من دروغ بود نه نه جان * هر چه دیدم دروغ بود نه نه جان

Mother dear, I slept, I saw a vision :
The Constitution flourished, Mother dear ;
All the poor were housed and nourished, Mother
dear !
But my dream was a delusion, Mother dear !
All delusion and confusion, Mother dear !

Between the Raging Wolf and the Lion

IN his *Press and Poetry of Modern Persia* Browne has given numerous specimens of this kind of patriotic poetry. Here are a few stanzas from the poems of only one of the modern poets, namely, Bahar, who though not attached to the court, is by popular consent still hailed as *Maliku's-Shu'arā*. Contrast the poetic thunder of this 'King of Poets' with the servile effusions of the court poets of yore !

The following verses are taken from a poem which purports to be a metrical history of Iran down to the time of Muhammad Ali. It was sent by the poet to the Shah through the Wazir-i-Darbar, exhorting the monarch to save the country from the aggression of the Russian 'Wolf' and the British Lion.

پاسبانان تا بچند این سستی و خواب گران
پاسبان را نیست خواب از خواب سر بردار هان *
کله خود را نگر بی پاسبان و بی شبان
یک طرف گرگ دمان و یک طرف شیر ژیان *
آن ز جنگ این رباید طعمه این از جنگ آن
هر یک آلوده بخون این گله جنگ و دهان *
پاسبان مست و گله مشغول و دشمن هوشیار
کار با یزدان بود کز کف برون رفتست کار *

' O watchman, how long this sloth and heavy sleep ?
Sleep is not for the watchman ; O raise thy head
from slumber !
Behold thy flock without watchman or shepherd,

On one side the raging wolf, on the other the
 roaring lion ;
 That one snatches the morsel from the claws of
 this one, and this one from that one,
 Each one having dyed his claws and fangs with
 the blood of this flock.
 The watchman drunk, the flock preoccupied, the
 enemy watchful—
 The affair rests with God, for it has passed out of
 our hands !'

پند بپذیر ای ملک زن پاک گهر رایگان
 نیکی از زشتان معجوی و یاری از همسایگان *
 و آنکه از سر دور کن گفتار این بیدمایگان
 پایداری چند خواهی جست از این بی پایگان *
 کشور تو خسروا گنجی است گنجی شایگان
 ترسم این گنج از گفت شاهها بر آید رایگان *
 طرفه گنجی در کف آوردی کنون بی هیچ رنج
 چون نبردی رنج شاهها کی شناسی قدر گنج *

' Accept advice freely, O King, from this loyal
 nature ;
 Seek not for fairness from the foul, nor friendliness
 from thy neighbours ;
 Then put away out of thine head the words
 of these worthless ones ;
 How long wilt thou seek for constancy from these
 inconstant ones ?
 Thy kingdom, O Prince, is a treasure, a royal
 treasure,
 And I fear, O King, lest this treasure may slip
 from thy hands without a struggle.

Thou hast obtained this treasure without trouble ;
Not having incurred any trouble, how canst thou,
O King, know its worth ? '

این همه آثار شاهان خسرو افسانه نیست
شاه را شاهان گزیر از سیرت شاهانه نیست *
خسروی اندر خور هر سست و هر دیوانه نیست
مجلس افروزی ز شمع است آری از پروانه نیست *
اینگ اینگ کد خدائی جز تو در این خانه نیست
خانه چون خنّه تو خسرو ویرانه نیست *
خیز و از داد و دهش آباد کن این خانه را
واندک اندک دور کن از خویشتن بیگانه را *

' All these monuments of the kings, O Prince, are
no vain tale ;
A king, O King, cannot dispense with kingly
qualities !
Kingship does not befit every sluggard or mad
man ;
Yea, it is the candle, not the moth, which
illuminates the banquet !
Lo and behold, in this house there is no master
save thee,
Yet is there no house so desolate as thine, O
Prince !
Arise, cause thy house to prosper by Justice and
Bounty,
And, little by little, put away the stranger from
thee ! '

As well might the poet have scattered pearls before
swine ! The sluggard simply slumbered on.

The 'King of Poets' denounces the King!

IN another poem this prince of the realm of poetry grows indignant and challenges the authority of the king. Exhorting the monarch to help generously the constitutional movement and not to cast himself and the nation into the gulf of abasement by his despotism, he openly raises the standard of rebellion. The charm of this poem lies in the fact that it is a *takhmis*, or 'five-some', and a *Tadmin*, or amplification, of one of Sa'di's ghazals. Taking a verse from an ode of Sa'di, Bahar prefixed to it three half verses of his own, thus constituting a *band* or stanza.

کِشْتِ مِلّت را کَرْدِی ز سَتمِ پَاکِ دُرّ
 شد کهنِ قصّه چنگیز ز بیداد تو نو *
 بجهان دل ز چه بُندی پس ازین کُفت و شُفّو
 'ایکه در نعمت و نازی بجهان غرّه مشو *
 که محالست درین مرحله امکان خلود *'

With tyranny thou didst reap clean the nation's
 crop ;

The old story of Chingiz Khan hath been renewed
 by such injustice ;

After this conversation wherefore should'st thou set
 thy heart on the world ?

' O thou who art in luxury and wealth, be not deceived
 by the world,

For to tarry eternally in this halting-place is an
 impossible contingency.'

بگذر از خطه تبریز و مقام شهادش
 بشنو آن قصه جانسوز و دل از غم بخراش *
 اندران خطه پس از آن کشش و آن پر خاش
 'خاک راهی که بران میگذری ساکن باش *
 که عیون است و جفون است و خدود است و قدود *'

Pass by the region of Tabriz and the place of its martyrs :

Hearken to that soul-melting story, and rend thy heart with woe !

In that region, after that slaughter and strife,

' Walk gently on the dust of that road wherever thou passest,

For it is (composed of) eyes and eyelids, cheeks and bodies !'

شاه یکدل نشد و کار هبا گشت و هدر
 ملت خسته در این مرحله کن فکر دیگر *
 پای امید منهد بر در شاه خود سر
 'دست حاجت چو بری پیش خداوندی بر *
 که کریم است و رحیم است و غفور است و ودود *'

The King is not single-hearted, and affairs are gone to rack and ruin :

O wearied nation, think of some fresh plan at this stage !

Set not the foot of hope at the gate of this head-strong monarch !

' If thou stretchest out thine hand in supplication stretch it towards One

Who is generous, merciful, forgiving and kind !'

شاه خود کیست بدین کبر و انایت او
تا نکو باشد درباره ما نیت او *
ما پرستنده حقیم والوهیت او
'کز ثری تا بثریا بعبودیت او *
همه در ذکر و مناجات و قیامند و قعود' *

Who, indeed, is the King, with this his pride and
egotism,
That his intentions with regard to us should be
good ?
We are the worshippers of God and His Divinity,
'*In whose service, from the dust to the Pleiades,
All are engaged in commemoration, prayers, rising
up and bowing down.*'

سر زند کوکب مشروطه ز گردون کمال
بسر آبد شب هجران و دمدم صبح وصال *
کار نیکو شود از فر خدای متعال
'ایکه در شدت و فقری و پریشانی حال *
* صبر کن کین دو سه روزی بسر آید معدود' *

The Constellation of the Constitution appears from
the Firmament of Perfection :
The Night of Parting draws to an end, and the
Morn of Union dawns :
All will be well through the glory of God Most
High.
'*O thou who art in hardship, poverty and distracted
circumstances !
Be patient, for these few brief days will come to an
end !*'

Reza Shah's Court Illumined by His Deeds

IT is time we rest awhile by the side of the bubbling stream of court poetry. Before we do so, however, we may end this discourse on a personal note, and give a word of praise to him to whom praise is due.

No poet is attached to the Darbar of Shah Reza Shah Pahlawi. Indeed, neither his Majesty, nor his court needs any panegyrist. Reza Shah is a man of deeds, not of words, and his court derives lustre from the sterling qualities and deeds of prowess and statesmanship, which distinguish his regime. No court poet is needed to blow the king's trumpets when the waters of running streams, leaves of trees and even the stones on the roadside bear eloquent testimony to the sagacious measures of reform undertaken in all the spheres of administration, city improvement, cultivation, commerce, art and industries. What need for the lustre of a poet's verses when the eyes of every human being in the land are beaming with joy and gratitude for the boon of safety and tranquillity, justice and security, now enjoyed by them after the protracted gloom cast over the country owing to incessant pillage, oppression and injustice ?

No Trace of Anarchy

The Shah may not need any eulogist; nevertheless the nightingales of Iran are to-day warbling their native woodnotes wild in praise of this monarch.

Only one specimen from the pen of poet Afsar should suffice :—

روزي که زهر مرد صدائي برخاست
 از هر طرف ملک بلائي برخاست *
 ضحاک ستم چو اژدهائي برخاست
 در خانه ما خانه خدائي برخاست *
 در آنشب تیره رهنمائي برخاست
 چون کاوه يکی شاه رضائي برخاست *
 سر تا سر ملک شد ازو امن و امان
 نه نام زفتنه ماند بر جا نه نشان *

On the day when a wail arose from every one,
 When from every direction there befell a calamity,
 When the tyrant Zohak like a serpent reared his
 head,

In our house appeared the Lord of the House.

In that dark night gleamed a guiding star,
 Like Kaveh a saviour like Reza Shah arose.
 From end to end the country became safe and secure.
 Neither the name of anarchy remained, nor a trace
 thereof.

These verses remind us of the glorious tribute paid
 by Salman Sawaji in the following impromptu verses
 which he recited in praise of Amir Shaykh Hasan :

بعهدت ز کس ناله برخاست
 بغیر از کمان کو بذالد رواست *
 که در عهد سلطان صاحب قران
 نکردست کس زور جز بر کمان *

In thy reign, no wail ever arose from anyone ;
 Except from the Bow, which, if it moans, is
 natural,
 For in the reign of the auspicious King
 None useth force except upon the Bow! ¹

The effusions of court poets are often regarded as mere drapery and ornament, not the vehicle of actual facts or of any genuine estimate of the qualities of their royal patrons, but how appropriately could one apply, without doing any violence to one's conscience, Salman's verses to the enlightened monarch under whose epoch-making rule the people of Iran have been emancipated from the fear of brigandage and pillage and placed securely on the path of progress and prosperity! This is an outstanding feature of Reza Shah's reign, illustrious for many other reforms, vividly bringing to our mind another graceful compliment paid to a king by another poet of immortal fame, whose *Gulistan* and *Bustan* are read and will be read all over the world so long as this earth receives warmth from the Sun and survives:—

مرا راحت از زندگي دوش بود
 که آن ماهرويم در آغوش بود *
 مرا و را چو ديدم سر از خواب مست
 بد و گفتم اي تنر و پيش تو پست *
 دمي نرگس از خواب نوشين بشوي
 چو کلين بخند و چو بلبل بگوي *
 چه مي خسي اي فتنه روزگار
 بيا و مي لعل نوشين بيار *

¹ Vide page 62 *ante*.

نگه کرد شوریده در خراب و گفتم
 مرا فتنه خراپی و کوئی مخفت *
 در ایام سلطان روشن نفس
 نبیند مکر فتنه در خواب کس *

Last night I had the happiness of life,
 Because that moon-faced was in my embrace.
 Seeing her eyes drowsy with sleep,
 I said to her 'O thou, before whom the Cypress
 is prostrate,
 Wash out, awhile, sweet slumber from thy Narcis-
 sus (eyes)!
 Smile like the Rose and chant like the Night-
 ingale!
 Why sleepest thou, O Disturbance of the times?
 Come, and bring the delicious wine of (thy) rubies
 (lips)!'
 In her sleep she looked at me drowsily and said:
 'Thou callest me Disturbance and askest me not
 to sleep;
 Knowest thou not that in the reign of our high-
 souled monarch
 None sees Disturbance save in sleep?'

THE END





D.G.A. 80.

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